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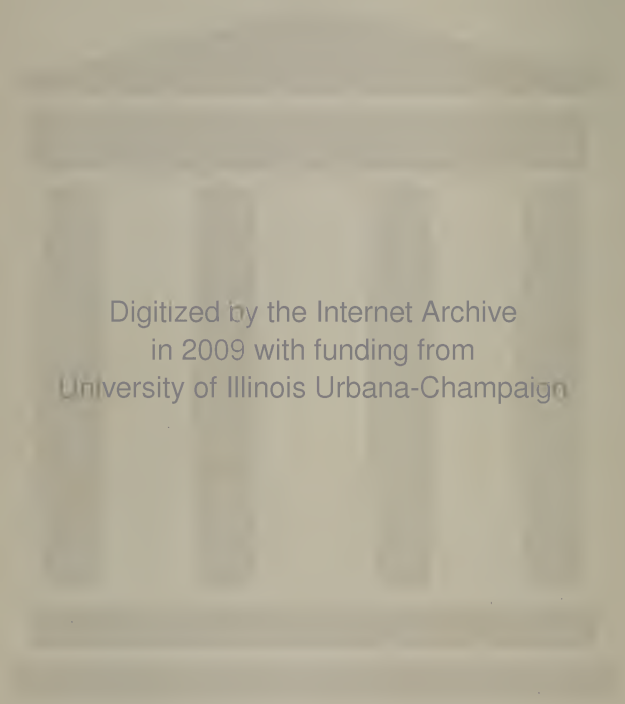
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Guy's Cliffe.

OWEN GWYNNE'S GREAT WORK.



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OWEN GWYNNE'S GREAT WORK.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE STORY OF WANDERING WILLIE,"
"CONRAD THE SQUIRREL," ETC.

"And Lancelot said—
 Be ye wise
To call him shamed who is but overthrown?
Thrown have I been, not once, but many a time,
Victor from vanquished issues at the last,
And overthrower from being overthrown."
 GARETH AND LYNETTE.

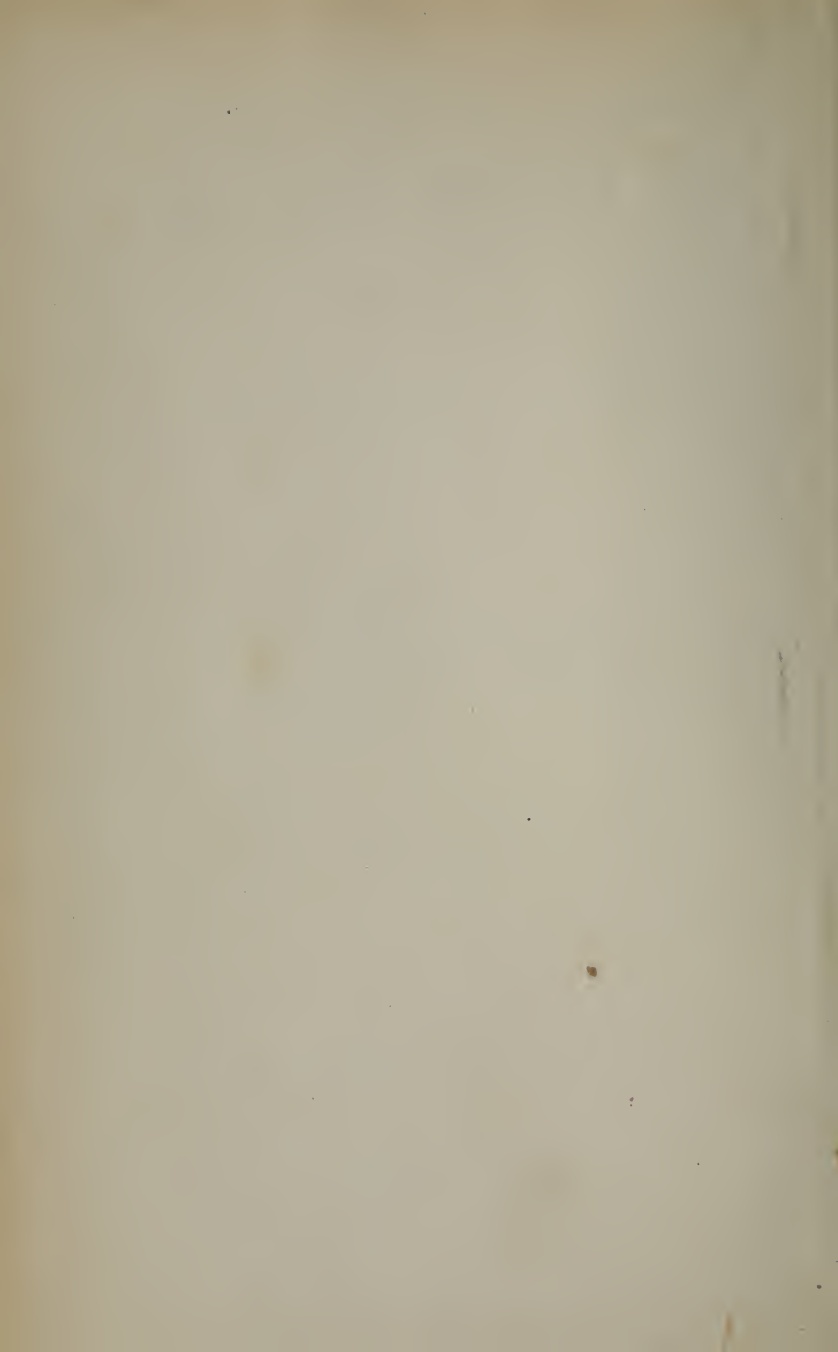
IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
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1875.

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W. C. J. - Johnson, 20 July 1952

OWEN GWYNNE'S GREAT WORK.



CHAPTER I.

THE lamp was still burning in Owen Gwynne's study, though the bells of St. Mary's Abbey had chimed midnight more than an hour ago, and all the church clocks in Marlixtowe had followed their leader.

The streets were silent and the town was asleep. Most people had been in their beds for the last two hours at least. But then, most people had no great work on hand. Owen Gwynne had: a work, the writing of which was the object of his life, its completion the one fair vision that brightened the horizon of his dreams. A great

Gen. Rev. Ray 6 Nov 51 Hector

work indeed—"Gwynne's History of the Fifteenth Century," a voluminous book, full of deep research and of profound scholarship, but of such comprehensive design that ordinary mortals heard of it with admiring awe, and the Marlixtowe folk asked each other in whispers whether it could by any possibility be finished in the term of Owen Gwynne's natural life.

Mrs. Gwynne knew what it was all about, which was more than any one else in the world, the author hardly excepted, professed to do. But Mrs. Gwynne knew. A title page had been completed (and at present it was the only complete thing about the work), setting forth at full length all that the book purported to show, to prove, and to inquire into. This title page was so long and complicated that no one as yet had been able to master it, save and except Mrs. Gwynne. She knew it by heart. The fair copy now lying in the drawer of the study table, with the big lettering and the small, the long lines and

the short, all written out just as they would be printed some day, was made by her own hard and industrious steel pen.

In a work of this magnitude, Mrs. Gwynne observed, time was everything. A certain portion must be got through each day. Therefore, as there had been some vexatious interruptions during the past day, the lamp still burnt in Owen Gwynne's study at half-past two in the morning.

Its rays, just now beginning to grow wavering and uncertain, and to tell of a long vigil and of wasting oil, fell upon a worn, lined, thoughtful face bent patiently over a big sheet of paper, which was covered with half-marginal, much erased handwriting. The erasures had grown more frequent during the last half-hour as the writer became increasingly weary. Mrs. Gwynne, standing by to work her willing horse to the utmost, saw that she had got nearly as much out of him as she was likely to get to-night.

She stood about, folding the scattered papers, collecting the pencils and pens, and

generally fidgeting in a way that would have been trying to an author of nervous temperament. But Owen Gwynne wrote on unheeding. In truth, she had fidgeted round him now, had rustled his papers, and straightened his books of reference, for five and twenty years, and, marvellous as it may seem, for nearly twenty he had ceased to mind it.

To do her justice, she did not talk. She only thought, and, at this moment, here is the substance of her reflections.

“Something must be done—it really must. We are in a bad way now, living on capital; and if it does not last until the book comes out, what are we to do, I wonder? Then it will be all right, of course. But it is a long time to wait, especially now that Owen has remodelled the whole work, and begun again on an improved plan. That is the loss of two good years of work. Not that I regret it, certainly not. It was not to be thought of that he should go on in the old way, when this new scheme will double the worth

of the book. I don't want him to be worried with money-cares. Only I don't see my way. One must live. The school had to go, of course. I do not regret that for one moment. He never had time for any steady work. Still, something must be done. There is little Maxy, too, we have to think of him, poor boy. Lance must come home. I see no other way. That is the long and short of it. Lance must come home."

And Mrs. Gwynne picked up a Spanish dictionary just pushed aside by her husband, and closed it with a decisive bang, as if she was shutting up her new resolution safely between its pages.

"It is late, isn't it?" said Mr. Gwynne, looking up at the sound. "I don't think I can do much more to-night. Look, the lamp is going out."

"It will last a little longer if I wind it up," answered Mrs. Gwynne, vigorously attacking it. "Don't leave off on account of the lamp, if it breaks in upon your train of thought. Go on, Owen."

"I haven't got a train of thought," said Mr. Gwynne rather disconsolately. "Sometimes I doubt whether I am getting on at all."

To light a bed-room candle at the smouldering fire, and to extinguish the lamp with a resolute turn of the screw, was Mrs. Gwynne's practical answer.

"You will come fresh to the work in the morning," she said, speaking out of the gloom into which she had plunged the study. "Another time we must allow nothing to break in upon your proper hours of study."

Mr. Gwynne sighed as he took his bed-room candle.

People seeing him for the first time now, wondered how he had ever been able to reign over such a turbulent realm as that of a boy's school. He was not a bit like the conventional type of a schoolmaster, prompt, stern, and a little pompous.

Owen Gwynne must always have mooned about absently with his hands behind his

back, and been plunged in learned reveries at the wrong moment. He must always have found it hard work to make up his mind, have accepted other people's decisions, have been ruled by his ushers, and imposed upon by his boys.

Nevertheless there was not a more popular school in that part of the country than his had been fifteen years ago. Until, unfortunately, Owen Gwynne took to writing. One midsummer holidays he published an archæological pamphlet, which turned out a decided success. Letters and compliments came pouring in upon the author; Mrs. Gwynne awoke to find herself the wife of a genius. And having once tasted the sweets of authorship it was not easy to go back to the drudgery of a schoolmaster's life. Before the boys came back Owen Gwynne was deep in historical research, and the materials for a new book were growing under his hands.

The work got on apace. The school gradually went down. Godfrey Deane, long

the pride of Stone Cross, was taken away. His father, the banker at Marlixtowe, thought he was learning nothing. Other boys followed. Mrs. Gwynne saw them depart with the stoicism of a Roman matron. All that was long ago now. The first book came out. It was not brilliantly successful, but just enough so to spur its author on to fresh exertions. It was then that he began his great work.

Two or three years passed. There were fewer ushers at Stone Cross, many fewer boys. Owen Gwynne was more absent than ever, and a great pile of crabbed-looking manuscript lay hoarded in the drawers of his study table.

Lancelot, his eldest son, was nearly grown up by this time, and had gone to study art at Rome. All his father's patience and perseverance, and much of his mother's tireless ambition had descended to him. He would have been a son to be proud of in most families, but neither Owen Gwynne nor his wife cared much about art.

They had another son. No one would ever be proud of Maxy, or ambitious for him; but those who care for a steadfast childish courage, for a brave bright spirit that pain and helplessness tried in vain to quench, for a high spirit and a sunny temper, would have been very fond of Maxy. Poor little boy, he was always at home. Every morning they put him on a couch near the window, and he lay there all day watching the boys in the playground with bright ungrudging interest.

They told him he would play, too, some day, and he believed it with a child's perfect faith, sometimes looking forward to the feats he would perform when that good time came, oftener absorbed in admiration for Godfrey Deane, or some other stalwart young hero of the playground.

No one knows for certain whether Mr. Gwynne gave up the school at last, or whether the school gave him up. Mrs. Gwynne stoutly asserted the former: the world at large was rather of an opposite opinion.

However that may be, there came a certain bleak, blustering December day on which Owen Gwynne stood for the last time in the old schoolroom that had so long called him master. It was cold, empty, and silent. The boys had gone home for the holidays a week ago, and when the school should re-open it would be under other auspices than his.

The wind came whistling through the windows, and swept round the big room. The long tables were bare—the ink-stained desks empty. Silence and dreariness had marked the place for their own. Something that was not either relief or regret passed through Owen Gwynne's mind as he stood for a moment in his accustomed place and looked back on the long course of years that closed to-day. Memories came thronging over him. So it was all really over. Just then it did not seem quite such unmixed pleasure to him as it was in general, to know that he was for ever quit of an unruly set of boys, who worried him and took up

all his time. After all, there had been some fine fellows among them. He used to be fond of some of them long ago: Godfrey Deane, for instance, and that poor young Grey who died. How full the room used to be once, and how noisy!

But the chill air made him shiver; and Mrs. Gwynne stood at the door calling to him not to keep the fly waiting. He went slowly down the room again, and passed out of the door with something of a sigh. His wife turned the key after him with a harsh, grating sound, that echoed through the dismantled house. So Owen Gwynne departed to Marlixtowe; and when the school re-opened, after Christmas, the Rev. Stephen Grimston reigned in his stead.

Since then the Gwynnes had lived in the Abbey Road. The doctor still told Maxy that he would be a strong fellow some day. Meanwhile he looked out of his window on a square bit of lawn, instead of on the merry playground, and that was nearly all the

difference that the change of home made to him.

Such as the house was here is its picture. The Abbey Road ran through the outskirts of Marlixtowe—a wide, smooth road, with a raised walk on each side, bordered by houses standing in their own gardens. Mr. Gwynne's was No. 4. It was an old-fashioned red brick house, faced with stone. Inside there was a matted stone hall with panelled walls, and an old staircase that creaked and groaned whenever it was walked upon, and often when it was not; square small rooms with low ceilings; one mullioned window looking into the road, where Maxy's couch was placed—only one, however; even that seemed out of character in a house so severely simple, unadorned, and square.

It stood sideways to the road. A door in the garden wall opened on to the lawn—square, too,—and a straight strip of gravel walk led up to the doorstep.

The whole place had about it an atmo-

sphere of authorship. A scholastic silence pervaded the rooms, where there were always extracts being copied, translations to be made, or quotations hunted up. It was profoundly dull. No one laughed or whistled or slammed the doors. The robins chirped in the holly-bush on the lawn, and some house-martins built a nest underneath the eaves, where they twittered cheerily enough; but that could not be helped. The flower borders under the wall had seen better days. Laurels, lilac bushes, hollyhocks, and mignonette flourished there still. Every now and then the lawn was mown. Mrs. Gwynne liked everything to be scrupulously neat, and had the grass kept short and smooth, just as she saw that Mr. Gwynne's hair was cut, and the kitchen chimney swept when necessary.

And the gardener who came to mow the lawn, having his heart in his profession, could not resist pruning the old rose trees, and putting in a few sweet-peas while he was about it. But they bloomed unheeded.

No hand gathered them to brighten the rooms; no one sauntered across the grass to count the rose-buds, and tie up the straggling sprays of honeysuckle.

Marlixtowe tradition told of a large family who had lived in the house half a century ago, when the Abbey Road ran through the country, and you looked across green meadows towards the towers of St. Mary's. A merry group of children used to romp on the lawn, and run in and out across the quiet hall. Maidens in chintz sacques and high-heeled shoes played an old harpsichord near the window where Maxy's couch stood now, or flitted over the grass to cut the faded roses for pot-pourri. Flowers smiled from every corner of the garden, and from every window in the house. Voices sang and laughed, and called each other all day long. In those days young lovers had come to sit with the maidens in the old arbour, long since fallen into decay, and all went merrily.

Now there only remained the silent house

and the untended garden, and from the window looked out one pale little sunflower — poor Maxy.

On the morning after Mrs. Gwynne had decided that her son Lance must be recalled from Rome, Owen Gwynne was pacing slowly, with his hands behind his back, up and down the garden path that led from the green door to the boundary wall.

It was one of those early spring days, perfect in beauty, more perfect still in promise, when to many people existence is in itself a pleasure, and each breath an unconscious thanksgiving.

It is almost impossible to remain quietly in the house on such a morning, for the air seems laden with messages from the awakened spring, and is full of a soft joy and rustle, as if it were eager to tell the glad tidings that it has come from blowing over violet beds, and ruffling the edges of opening primroses.

But Owen Gwynne neither saw nor felt

anything of this. A certain number of turns along his quarter-deck walk he must take every day, for the good of his health; but his heart was in his book, and as he walked he was mentally rounding the period of one of those sonorous sentences in which his soul delighted.

He would have talked learnedly enough about the fifteenth century, about the kings who reigned, the statesmen who schemed, and the soldiers who fought four hundred years ago, but his eyes were holden that he should not see the glories of the opening year. And yet those heroes he was full of, those princes and courtiers, had long lain "low in the dust of half-forgotten kings," while here was the spring back again once more, and radiant in new life and hope.

Poor Owen Gwynne! he did not know how the bees were humming in many a blossoming orchard, or why it was that the rooks cawed so noisily from the elms in the Abbey meadows. How should he? Why, he had no thought even of the sweet little spring secrets close at home.

He never guessed that a pair of black-birds were gloriously happy in the big laurel bush that he brushed against in his walk, that their nest was full of eggs, and their little hearts of joy. He did not know that the apricots on the sunny walls were "set," and that there was fairy fruit—tiny, wondrous green balls—folded up daintily in the pinky bloom. Poor Owen Gwynne !

Maxy's couch was drawn up as near as possible to the open window, where the soft air could blow in upon him. Now and then he raised himself, and stretched out his hand into the sunshine. He looked out and saw the showers of blossom which the lazy wind shook down from the fruit-trees ; saw birds go skimming over the garden wall, out somewhere into the wide world beyond ; saw, framed by the window, a bit of blue sky, and white clouds float across it.

Presently Maxy saw his mother go out to join her husband, and say something to him that he heard with an impatient gesture. He stood still and pointed towards

the house, but she laid her hand on his arm, and drew him on again. Maxy, surveying them from the window, and shooting at them with a pea-shooter when ever their backs were turned, idly wondered what they could be talking about.

In truth, Mr. Gwynne was being brought back abruptly and unwillingly to the present time. His wife wished him to sanction her sending for Lance from Rome. Her own mind was made up, but still, for the form of the thing, it was better to lay before him the necessities of the case. Unused to be troubled with household concerns, Mr. Gwynne listened, with half-startled, half-injured attention, to her lucid statement of ways and means. It was certainly distressing that she should find it so difficult to make the two ends meet, but surely that was her affair, not his. Furthermore, to Mrs. Gwynne's inexpressible surprise, her husband did not like her plan of summoning Lance to help them. He was getting on very well at Rome, and ought by no means to be disturbed.

Then what was to be done? Mrs. Gwynne went over the ground again with unruffled patience.

"Poor Lance," said his father. "I think it seems hard on him. I am sure he would not like it. Can you think of no other plan, my dear?"

"None that would be of any real use. I know that Mr. Deane is willing to take Lance into the bank immediately; and he pays his clerks very liberally. It is an opening that we shall not meet with easily again."

"Perhaps not; but still—no, I don't think it will do."

"What do you propose, then?" asked Mrs. Gwynne.

"I?" answered her husband, hurriedly. "Oh, I propose nothing, of course not."

"Will you take pupils again?"

"My dear, I don't know what you are thinking of. Take pupils! It is quite out of the question. How can you propose such a thing? A sheer waste of time. You must know that it is impossible."

"I know it, therefore I see the necessity of sending for Lance home."

"Well, I can't tell. It is very distressing. Poor Lance, he seemed quite full of his painting when he last wrote. I am afraid it would be a sad wrench to him."

"It is a sacrifice, no doubt, and I am sorry for him, poor boy. But I think we ought to ask it of him. It is hard that you should have no son to help you, and surely a change would come more easily to Lance than to you."

"Of course, yes, of course. Still he has chosen his profession, and we gave our consent at the time."

"I never consented willingly," said Mrs. Gwynne. "You must do me the justice to allow that." And her tone expressed, "Behold the consequences of disregarding me."

"Ah, true. But he was tremendously set upon it. They said at the time, if I remember right, that he would never settle to anything else. It is that which makes me doubtful now."

“Have you considered the alternative? You would have to give your book up—for a time, at all events; to give it up now, when it is so far on, when you have got it all clear before you.”

Mr. Gwynne was but mortal. The first mention of his book recalled his thoughts into their accustomed groove. “Ah, very true, perfectly true. I had not taken that into consideration. It would be a pity certainly to stop now, just as I have land in sight, as one may say—a cruel pity. Eh, my dear?”

“It is not to be thought of for a moment.”

“And, after all, poor Lance is young—a mere boy. Changes don’t fall heavily at his age. All the same I do wish we could struggle on without disturbing him.”

“So do I, very sincerely. Still, Owen, you must remember that you do not work only for your own sake.”

“No, indeed; I feel that. It is hard work—uphill work very often; but, for all your

sakes, I must go on. I wonder how soon I can get it done. Can I go in now? I have a great deal to do this morning, and surely I have walked for half an hour."

"Then I am to write to Lance to-day?" said Mrs. Gwynne, following him into the study.

"Eh? Yes, write. I cannot find a sheet of paper on which I noted some very important—— Is this it? Ah, yes, here it is. I was afraid that I had mislaid it. Write by all means, my dear, if you like." And Owen Gwynne relapsed into the 15th century.

Mrs. Gwynne had conquered, but she went back into the parlour unelated by her victory, and told Maxy she was ready for his lessons.

Maxy cordially hated them. Nature had intended him for a pickle, and as far as in him lay he fulfilled his vocation. True, his sphere was limited; but he could draw caricatures in his books, and tear pages out of his Latin grammar. Patient and stiff,

Mrs. Gwynne daily took up her position by his couch, and the day's work was got through somehow. It did not affect Mrs. Gwynne that her scholar stretched himself and yawned, looked out of the window instead of listening, and seldom recollected ten words of what he had been reading. She had done her duty by him. One o'clock struck. Maxy swallowed his last yawn, and closed his book. His mother folded up her work, put down "careless" or "idle" in Maxy's mark-book, and that business was over for the day.

Then the letter to Lance was written, and despatched to Rome by the afternoon's post.

It reached Lance Gwynne on a sunny evening, when he and a party of brother artists entered Rome by the Porta Portese after a sketching expedition to Ostia. They got their letters as they passed the Post Office. Lance read his while he slowly mounted the Spanish steps, read it twice through with a puzzled expression and then,

putting it in his pocket, leant absently over the wall, and stared at the sunlit city without seeing it.

The Piazza di Spagna below was full of shadows and people and voices. There were sturdy beggars basking in the low sunshine, and contadino models gossiping in picturesque groups round the boat-shaped basin of the fountain. The air was scented with almond blossom and orange-flower, and huge baskets of camellias and violets stood at the corners of the streets.

Here and there the church bells were beginning to ring for the Ave Maria, and now the convent church of the Trinità de' Monti close at hand joined in with its deep monotonous bells.

Presently another English artist, a few years older than himself, came briskly up the steps and put his hand on Lance's shoulder.

"Got your letters, Lance?"

"Why, yes. I got more than I bargained for."

"As how?"

"I got a summons home."

"Eh? You can't go. What do they want you for?"

"That's more than my mother tells me. Read this."

"Short and sweet," said Austin Hope, returning the letter. "There's nothing wrong evidently. Just say you haven't time to go."

"I wish I could, but I shall have to make time."

"You oughtn't."

"I think there's a boat from Civita Vecchia to-morrow," said Lance. "I can catch the diligence to-night."

Austin Hope shrugged his shoulders.

"You'll never make much of an artist, Lance."

"Why, what do you want me to do?"

"Stay quiet and do your work. I am thankful that there is nobody to send for me home for a little talk upon family affairs."

"You'd have to go if there were."

"Not I. They will keep you dawdling there all the summer."

"I wish I knew what they want." And Lance studied the letter again, but Mrs. Gwynne had purposely made it as vague as it was peremptory.

"Well, I must go and get ready. You will see me off, I suppose?"

"Of course, if you will go; but I think it's a mistake."

Lance had much to do, and many farewells to exchange during the next hour or two. The news of his departure spread quickly, and his room was crowded by his artist friends.

"Going to England!" exclaimed one of them, a young Englishman, Nigel Ruthven by name, who was constantly with Lance and Austin Hope, and was very unlike either of them. "Going to England to-night! I have a great mind to go with you?"

"You, Nigel! What on earth should you go to England for?"

"Oh, I don't know. For a change. One can't always stay in one place."

"I thought you were hard at work on a picture?"

"Oh, so I am, but I am not sure about finishing it. I have thought of another subject that I like better. But you are a lucky fellow, Lance, to have to go."

"I wish you could go instead of me, then, with all my heart," said Lance. "I would give a good deal to stay where I am, just now."

"Well, I never can see any one packing up without wanting to start too. I declare I don't see why I should not go with you to-night."

"How disgusted Hope would be with you! Here he has been pitching into me for what I can't help, and if you were to go without any necessity——"

"Oh, Austin's an enthusiast: he is mad about painting. Here he comes as black as thunder. I say, Austin, I want your advice: shall I go home with Lance for a month or so?"

"I shall be back long before that," said Lance, closing his portmanteau.

"Well, Austin, shall I? What say you?"

"Please yourself," answered Austin Hope grimly. "It's all one to me."

"Beneath contempt," said Nigel, laughing. "I dare say you are right."

"Well, are you coming?" inquired Lance.

"No, I suppose not. I dare say I had better stay here after all, and grind on at the old work."

"Come along, Lance, will you?" interposed Austin Hope impatiently. "You've half a dozen things to do before you start."

The two friends walked down to the diligence office together. Austin Hope did not try again to alter Lance's resolution, but as they stood waiting in the dark courtyard he began abruptly:—

"I say, Lance, you will stick to painting, won't you?"

Lance looked rather surprised, but he answered briefly, "Of course I shall."

"Don't stay in England longer than you can help, and don't take to anything else instead."

"Is it likely?"

"Well, no, I suppose not."

"Then why on earth do you keep on asking? what is all this about?" said Lance, waxing impatient.

"Upon my word I don't know. I don't like your going, that's all. I have not got many friends," said Austin in a less matter-of-fact tone than usual, "and I should be sorry to lose you. I had rather the whole lot went than you, Lance."

"Thanks, I'm not thinking of going in the sense of giving up my profession; you may be sure of that. I can't think why you make so much of my having to go home for a few days on business."

"Well, well, only stick to the old shop."

"Am I more likely to leave it than you are yourself?"

"Why yes, I think you are. You told me your people did not half fancy your taking

to painting. Now, I haven't got any well-to-do relations to bother me."

Lance's attention had wandered to his portmanteau, which was just then mounting on to the top of a loosely piled pyramid of luggage on the roof of the diligence, but he turned round with a laugh at Austin's last words.

"Well-to-do relations! Why, Austin, my father is a poorer man than you are, if possible."

"Not easy to be that," said Austin Hope placidly.

"Still, authorship doesn't seem to be a thriving trade," continued Lance. "You needn't distress yourself on that score."

"I suppose you don't believe in presentiments?" asked Austin, rather as if he was ashamed of himself.

"No, I don't," responded Lance; "and I should be sorry to think you did. How slow those fellows are! We shan't get off to-night. You won't forget my messages, old fellow."

Meantime the diligence had received its load of passengers, and its overload of luggage, and was ready to depart.

The lights danced about. The confusion of excited voices grew louder, and Lance's quietly spoken farewell was drowned in the chorus of vehement Italian talk that was going on all round.

"I will see after your things," said Austin Hope. "Write and tell me when you will be back."

"All right," said Lance, mounting into the banquette. "Good-bye."

The whip cracked, the bells on the horses' harness began to jingle, their hoofs clattered noisily on the uneven pavement.

"*Buon viaggio!*" shouted those who remained behind, as the Civita Vecchia diligence went lumbering out of the courtyard, and drove off through the dark streets towards the starlit Campagna.

Austin Hope watched it out of sight, gave a half sigh, lit his pipe, and walked home, thinking of the picture he was painting.

CHAPTER II.

FROM Rome to Marlixtowe. The two places both literally and figuratively are very far apart. Nevertheless, a few days and nights of hard travelling brought Lance Gwynne to his journey's end. He arrived between the dark and the daylight of an April evening, when the shops were being closed, and the lamps lighted in the Marlixtowe High Street.

At this hour the Abbey Road was almost deserted. The walls, overhung by trees and shrubs, looked like the long black lines of a fortification, and the white road glimmered between them. No one was stirring, except a belated baker's boy, with a big

basket and a shrill whistle, whom Lance followed, marching unconsciously along to the tune of "Rosalie the Prairie Flower."

Some places strike one with a curious sense of unchangeableness. Lance turned in at the green garden door with a conviction that when he last stood there, it was in the same half light, with the same cold spring wind blowing in his face, and with the steps and whistle of that identical baker's boy receding along the road.

He went in through the garden, entered the house, and pushed open the parlour door. It was in total darkness except where two faint squares of light showed the uncurtained windows.

"No one here?" asked Lance, pausing at the door.

"I'm here; no one else," answered a small bright voice from the darkness.

"Can that be Lance?"

"Yes; and you are Maxy, I suppose. Where are you?"

"I am here. Take care: you will tumble

over the table. I am so glad to see you, Lance ! ”

“ But where is everybody? Where is my mother? and what are you doing in the dark ? ”

“ They forgot me, I suppose,” said Maxy, laughing. “ They do sometimes. If you could remember the way to the mantelpiece, there are some matches there, I know. I wish I had a light.”

“ Can't you come and help me ? ”

“ Oh dear no ! I wish I could. I could make Jane hear if I shouted very loud ; but then that would disturb father.”

“ Is he ill ? ” asked Lance, groping his way towards the fireplace. “ What's the matter? Is anything going on ? ”

“ ‘ Gwynne's History of the Fifteenth Century,’ ” said Maxy in a demure tone. “ It's always going on. Look out, Lance. ‘ Froissart ’ is on the mantelpiece, and ‘ Robertson's History ’ is behind with the matches.”

“ But can't I see anybody? Where's my mother ? ”

"In the study. She came here a little while ago, and said that some new books had come, and father had got a fresh start, so tea was put off," said Maxy, with a small sigh. "That's right, Lance; you've found them."

Lance struck a light, and turned to look for the owner of the bright voice and cheery laugh. In a far corner of the room, on a very big old-fashioned sofa, he saw a small childish figure sitting up, with a radiant look of welcome in a pair of dark eyes, and a morsel of a weak white hand eagerly extended.

"Maxy, my boy, are you always here?"

"Oh yes, always. We are awfully glad you have come, Lance. We did not think you could be here so soon. I wish tea was ready. I shouldn't think mother would mind father's being disturbed if she knew you were here."

The last words were spoken doubtfully.

"But, Maxy, can't you walk at all?"

"I! oh, no; not a bit. But I'm very

well off except when they forget me sometimes. I say, Lance, you don't know how glad we are to see you." And the eager voice and sparkling little face seemed striving to make up for all that was wanting in Lance's welcome home. "Mother thought you could not possibly be here before to-morrow."

"I came over by the night boat," said Lance. "Maxy, what made my mother send for me in such a hurry?"

"I don't know. Why, how hungry you must be!" And hospitality getting the better of Maxy's prudence, he began shouting "Hallo! Jane, Jane," at the top of his voice.

The study door was opened wide enough to allow a prolonged "Hush" to be heard, and then a grave remonstrating voice said, "Maxy, Maxy, thoughtlessness."

"No, mother; here's Lance."

"Lance!"

And Lance met his mother in the hall.

The meeting was not a demonstrative one, for the Gwynnes, always excepting

Maxy, were not demonstrative people. Nevertheless they were very glad to see one another, though the first sight of her son was rather a shock to Mrs. Gwynne. She had not expected him to have altered so much. This was not the Lance she had parted with, the handsome, quiet boy she used to order about. The present Lance was decidedly a man, and looked as if he might have a tolerably strong will of his own.

Mrs. Gwynne studied his face as he sat opposite to her, and the longer she looked the more determined she thought it. His firmly cut mouth, and manner of quiet self-reliance, rather dismayed his mother.

She remembered that dutiful though he had always been, when it came to choosing his profession, Lance had taken and kept his own way in spite of her opposition.

"But then," thought Mrs. Gwynne, "I had no very strong motive for resisting at that time. I let myself be over persuaded; it will be different now." Still the task she

had set herself did not look quite so easy as she had expected. Lance was so entirely unsuspecting too, and evidently his whole heart was in his work. "I will put off speaking to him as long as I can," she thought; "it will give him time to fall back into his old position."

"No, Lance, it is too late to talk business this evening," she said, when he followed her into her room at night.

"I want to get my orders as soon as possible," said Lance, as he held her hand. "I have really so little time to spare just now."

"Well, to-morrow," she answered uneasily. "Not now, good-night."

"There's nothing wrong, mother, is there?" he said, turning to leave her.

"No, no; do go to bed, Lance, and get a good sleep. You look tired."

Lance received a warning that night before he went to bed, which might have told him that something was going to be required of him, only he was too sleepy to attend to it.

Jane, once his nurse, from time immemorial a member of the Gwynne household—grim, philosophical, faithful-hearted old Jane, welcomed him with a deep sigh and a shake of the head that was intended to speak volumes. “So you really have come home. Ah well! poor boy.”

“Why, Jane, haven’t you anything pleasanter to say to me than that?” asked Lance cheerily, as he took her by both hands.

“Least said soonest mended, Mr. Lance,” responded Jane.

“Why, what’s the matter? Has anything gone wrong?” he asked again, with a little touch of impatience. “You are all so frightfully mysterious. I can’t get any one to tell me what made my mother send for me in such haste.”

“More haste worse speed, sometimes,” said Jane. “You’ll hear soon enough what you are wanted for, Mr. Lance. You go to bed; but mind you look before you leap, my dear, that’s all.”

Jane’s was emphatically “proverbial phi-

losophy." She derived real comfort from her store of wise saws and old wives' sayings, and had a proverb ready for every emergency. Years ago, when Owen Gwynne's marriage was announced, Jane's only comment was, that "men would be men." After the new wife had come home, she added quietly, "What can't be cured must be endured."

For Jane knew her mistress well. She remembered her when she was Joan Pritchard, the daughter of a spendthrift father, a small squire, owning a tumble-down wild place in the Welsh mountains. Joan had a sister, Patience, and one brother. The old squire's jovial companions used to stand rather in awe of the two dark quiet girls, with their distant manners and rare smiles. They were alike—both good-looking, both silent, both unpopular. Joan Pritchard was much given to dreaming in those days, and in her dreams something always happened that made her great. But a crash and downfall came instead. Her father was completely ruined, and Joan and Patience

lost their home. Joan did not become great; she married Owen Gwynne, the schoolmaster of Stone Cross.

She had not been a bad mistress to Jane. In their queer way the two women were attached to one another, though each "saw the other's faults" with great clearness. Time also had forged links which bound Jane more firmly than ever to the Gwynnes.

When a fall down a flight of stone steps changed Maxy from the finest baby that ever was seen into a life-long invalid, Jane took him in his helplessness and suffering home to her rough tender heart. In the words of one of her beloved proverbs, "God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb." Who could tell the blessing that Jane had been to Maxy?

She adored him, and he knew it, by some subtle instinct, but certainly by no voluntary sign of affection she had ever given him. First Lance, then Maxy, grew up in the bracing atmosphere of her rigorous disapproval. What she secretly thought

of them was another matter, and was no one's business but her own.

"Oh, Jane," said Maxy, sitting up in bed on the evening of Lance's return, "isn't it jolly, Lance having come home?"

Jane jerked up her head in a way that betokened general disapprobation, and said she never shouted until she was out of the wood.

"Come, old Jane, you know you're as pleased as Punch," said Maxy. "I don't know why you're so glum."

"Lookers-on see most of the game," said Jane.

"Well, but isn't he handsome?"

"Handsome is as handsome does, Master Maxy," said Jane, walking off with the candle.

The next day, Lance's first at home, was one of ceaseless rain. It was falling when he came down to breakfast, in a steady, business-like down-pour that was thoroughly dispiriting.

For there is rain and rain. Who but breathes freer when the heavy drops pour thick from a thunder-cloud? And few things are brighter than a fast, shining shower as it slants through a shaft of sunbeams. But this was altogether another kind of wet day. The grey sky looked doggedly determined to give the earth a thorough soaking; clouds of mist rolled slowly over one another past the windows, and the chances of its clearing up were not great enough even to furnish a subject of talk for the silent breakfast-table. It was not the household custom to make conversation at breakfast. Mr. Gwynne had an open book beside his tea-cup. Mrs. Gwynne closed the tea-caddy, locked up the sugar, and waited with elaborate patience. The only sunbeam made its appearance about the middle of breakfast in the person of little Maxy.

"What a jolly wet morning," he said, rubbing his hands cheerily as he was put upon his sofa.

"Are you well, Maxy?" asked his mother.

"Yes, all right, mother, thank you." The same question and answer passed between them every morning, after which silence set in again.

At last Mr. Gwynne rose, put his open book crosswise over his arm, pushed back his spectacles, and retreated into the study.

"Mother, can't you stay and talk to me now?" said Lance, getting into despair, as he saw her preparing to follow.

"No, not this morning. I shall be too busy. But there will be plenty of time to-day, for I suppose you won't be going out."

Plenty of time, indeed, during that long rainy forenoon, which would have seemed interminable but for little Maxy! The wet day made no difference to him, and his spirits rose higher than ever at the prospect of not being left alone.

Lance saw a flash of surprised satisfaction cross his face when he found that his brother meant to stay in the sitting-room. A few old books, some scraps of drawing-paper, and his own thoughts were commonly

the only companions of Maxy's mornings. Sometimes the maid coming in to put coals on the fire was startled at finding him laughing all by himself over his drawing; and any chance visitor was sure to be received with the same alert look of welcome.

Lance let him alone at first, and pretended to be absorbed in writing a letter. Whenever he looked up he found the bright eyes fixed gravely on him. A new face did not often come within the range of Maxy's observation. He was making the most of the present opportunity. When his eyes met Lance's he smiled a little, but did not speak. It was almost sad to see how perfectly he had been trained never to interrupt.

Lance wondered how long he would lie so quietly, with his head propped on his arm, and what it was which he found to look at. At last he drew a long sigh, nodded his head as if satisfied, and turned away. After all, silent contemplation was

not a part of Maxy's original nature. Circumstances had taught it to him. He began to look out now for entertainment.

Presently some one passed who amused him. Lance could hardly help joining in the little low laugh with which he pounced upon his drawing-board. Away went the small, thin hand scribbling with all its might, and you could almost have seen the joke in Maxy's face.

The passer-by, struggling with wind and rain and rebellious umbrella, fought on his watery way, and most likely had got safe home long before the amusement he afforded Maxy was exhausted. But the portrait, such as it was, was finished at last, and the artist sank back tired, but complacent. Next he drew a big book towards him, a very well-worn old friend it looked, full of engravings. He turned over the pages rather fast. Evidently he knew them all so well.

Lance could stand it no longer.

“Do you like drawings, Maxy?”

“ Oh, don't I ! ”

Lance went upstairs three steps at a time, and presently a portfolio made its appearance beside Maxy's sofa.

“ Only a few sketches, you know. I didn't bring many home.”

But such sketches, such a portfolio as Maxy had never dreamt of. Every sort of drawing had been tumbled in promiscuously. They were almost all Italian—glimpses to Maxy of a brighter land, and of a sunny dawdling out-of-doors kind of a life. Many were very rough, but all had the glow of southern colouring, and through them all ran the same vivid charm. Here and there was a pen-and-ink sketch, or a caricature ; brown faces, quaint buildings ; a few carefully finished copies of old frescoes, with the name of some little known convent written in the corner ; figures just sketched in, and scraps of drapery—studies for some picture that lived as yet only in Lance's dreams. Maxy pored over them all in the silence of enchantment.

"Lance, you *are* an artist," he exclaimed at last.

"I hope so," answered Lance, looking amused.

"You will beat Raffaele, and Rubens, and Paul What's-his-name, all to nothing, you know."

"What do you know about Rubens and Paul What's-his-name?" And Lance came and leant over the end of the sofa.

But hero-worship had taken full possession of Maxy's willing heart. This wonderful elder brother—this grave, handsome, quiet-looking Lance, was certainly a genius. Maxy twisted himself round so as to look up at him.

"You are a great painter, Lance, are not you?"

"No, indeed, Maxy." Lance turned over one drawing after the other with a dissatisfied sigh.

"But you soon will be—very soon?"

"Shall I, little Hopeful?" And "little Hopeful" was for many a day Lance's nickname for his brother.

Lance turned over a few more of his sketches, and then said, "If I am not, it will not be for want of hard work, Maxy; I promise you that."

"Thank you, Lance," said Maxy very seriously.

And then they began to look over the portfolio together. Lance told the story of each drawing, and Maxy had never spent such a day—never. Somehow, before the rainy morning merged into an equally rainy afternoon, Maxy knew a great deal about Lance's life at Rome—that wonderful artist life; a great deal, too, about his brother's thoughts and hopes and fears, and about the enthusiasm for his art that in general he kept very closely to himself. But Maxy's eyes drew him on. He had never told so much even to Austin Hope.

"And you, Maxy, you must be an artist, too, I think, if you care so much about pictures," said Lance at last. "Let's see that drawing of yours."

It made Lance laugh, at all events.

"Oh, no; of course I could never be an artist."

"Then what do you mean to be, Maxy?"

"I? Oh, a sailor most likely, or perhaps an emigrant," said Maxy in a matter-of-fact way.

"You must make haste and get well, then."

"Yes." Maxy spoke without much enthusiasm.

"Isn't it very dull to be always lying there?"

"Sometimes, I suppose it is; but I'm so used to it, you see."

And Lance remembered how he had thought in the morning that one day indoors would be unbearable. He was so full of the boy that when, late in the afternoon, his mother called him into the next room his first words were about Maxy.

"What do the doctors say of him, mother? Will he get quite well?"

"I don't know. They say so. Poor boy, I don't see much change in him myself."

Lance looked back into the other room, where he could see the little figure lying alone, out of hearing though not quite out of sight. "Poor little fellow!"

Mrs. Gwynne sighed too.

"Well, Lance," she began presently, "I thought you wanted to hear why I sent for you."

"Of course I do," said Lance, rousing himself.

"I am much gratified at your obeying my summons so soon. The fact is, my dear Lance, that I want your advice and your help."

She stopped, and Lance said "Yes?" interrogatively, with great inward surprise. When did his mother ever want advice before?

"And I feel sure that you will be ready to give it. I have no doubt of that, Lance."

Again Mrs. Gwynne paused and looked up at her son. He was standing near the fire, with one elbow leaning on the mantel-

piece, and he smiled and answered, "I hope not, mother," with the same quietness of manner. Mrs. Gwynne found her words very tardy in coming.

"I did not send for you from Italy without a great deal of consideration, and I was sorry, really sorry, to be obliged to do it."

"Never mind that," said Lance. "After all it is only losing a little time. I can make up for it when I go back, and of course I shall be only too glad if I can be of any use to you or my father."

"You can, Lance; but at the expense of more than a little of your time."

Mrs. Gwynne spoke so solemnly that Lance looked at her in renewed surprise. She smoothed her black gown over her knees and bethought herself. She had intended carrying things with a higher hand than this, and she began in a firmer tone—"You know that I never approved of your becoming an artist. It was a profession I should never have chosen for you, but I suffered myself to be overruled. It was

against my better judgment that I gave my consent."

"Still it has turned out pretty well hitherto," said Lance.

"Pray allow me to finish. I say that it has not turned out well. If you had chosen—I must say it—less selfishly, you might by this time have been in a position to help your father. Hush! I don't wish to reproach you. I did not wish even to allude to this, except to remind you of all your father has done for you, of the first-rate education he gave you, at the cost of how many hours' toil, which with his talents might have been spent on higher work than mere school-keeping. Lance, I am very sorry, but you cannot go on being an artist."

"I can never be anything else," said Lance quickly.

"Not from choice, perhaps; but from necessity. I have told you that a sacrifice is demanded of you. Will you fail your father now?"

"I don't understand," he said, after a

moment's silence. "Tell me what it is you want me to do?"

"Lance, you know all about your father's book." Lance nodded. "You know—no, you have been away so long that you can't know, how everything has been made to give way to one object—the leaving him free to write. For that the school was given up; for that I have striven, struggled, saved. I have tried hard—hard, Lance, to keep things straight and to get on alone; I have, indeed. But I cannot do it. Not till the last moment have I turned to you. Surely you are the natural person to help him, his eldest son."

"Of course, mother, of course."

"It will be such a remarkable book," continued Mrs. Gwynne. "Lance, his fame ought to be as dear to you as it is to me. Are you not willing to give up something for your father's sake?"

"I am willing," said Lance steadily. "What can I do?"

"I have spoken to Mr. Deane, one of

Deane Brothers, the bankers. He is ready to take you into the bank as a clerk."

Lance turned suddenly, and leaning over the mantelpiece covered his eyes with his hand.

"Thus you would be getting a regular salary, and your father's mind would be set at ease for his work. Do you follow me, Lance?" she inquired as he gave no answer.

"It is very sudden." He spoke in a low quick voice. "I was utterly unprepared for anything like this."

"You said just now that you were prepared to help your father."

"Did I? Yes, I am."

There was a pause which Mrs. Gwynne did not try to break.

"Mother, ask me anything but that. I cannot do it."

"And your promise—how else can you fulfil it?"

Lance was silent.

"I know what an artist's life is," said his

mother. "For one who succeeds how many fail! At the best, how long will it be before you begin to make money by painting? I don't mean selling a stray picture here and there that may chance to take some one's fancy." She held up her hand to stop Lance, who had looked up eagerly; but the light faded from his face as she went on—"What we need is a fixed sum of money coming in regularly; and that, Lance, you have it in your power to supply."

"You do not know," said Lance, speaking calmly by a great effort. "You do not at all know what you are asking me."

"I am asking you to do your duty," she answered in her steadily severe voice. She had pitied Lance until now, there had even been a sort of pathos in her pleading with him; but his first word of remonstrance hardened her into marble. "I am disappointed in you, Lance."

"Mother, you ask too much."

She got up to go away. "I will not listen to this. When you have weighed it coolly

you will speak differently. I do you that justice, Lance."

"Don't go. Stay one moment." Lance put his hand on her arm and tried to speak gently. "Can you listen to me for a minute?"

"Yes; but what more can there be to say. You can only come to one conclusion in the end."

"I don't know. I can't tell," said Lance, with a deep sigh; "but I am sure you have not any idea, mother, what my art is to me. I only want you just to try if you can see the thing for an instant from my side of the question, will you? You believe that I would do anything in the world to help my father——"

"Deeds, not words," interrupted Mrs. Gwynne.

"Yes"—Lance spoke very sadly—"true. Do not suppose that I mean to draw back from what I have said. But is there really only that one way?"

"I do not know what you mean."

"If it were possible—I really am getting on well. If you would let me try to help you without giving up my profession: I know I could. Besides——"

"Go on, Lance," she said coldly.

"No. What is the use?"

"You had better finish what you were saying. 'Besides' what?"

"I was only wondering whether you could get much good out of people when you have taken from them all they care to live for."

"*All* they care to live for! Lance, I am surprised at you."

"I was wrong." Lance spoke more naturally than he had done hitherto. "I oughtn't to have said that. What I meant was that I have given up my life to painting. I hardly know if it is in my power to take it back."

"It is in every one's power to do his duty. Notwithstanding all you have said, I expect you to do yours. Lance," she added hurriedly, "there is your father.

Whatever you may do, I trust to your honour not to speak to him of this."

"Why not? Doesn't he know about it?"

"Certainly he does."

"And approves of it?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Gwynne; "though perhaps he thought more of you than you seem inclined to think of him."

The tea was ready, and the lights lighted in the next room. Maxy's couch was drawn up to the table, and the kettle was singing on the hob. In the room where Lance and his mother had been talking it had grown quite dark. Mrs. Gwynne turned to leave it.

"Do not stay here," she whispered. "Your father will be asking for you." For Lance had fallen back into his former attitude, standing with his head upon his arm. "At least," repeated his mother, "we may save him the worry of discussions. Come, Lance."

Lance passed his hand over his forehead once or twice, and came out into the lighted

room ; came out to meet Maxy's bright, questioning eyes, and his father's half kind half absent greeting : "I have seen nothing of you to-day, my boy."

"Lance, bring me the kettle," interposed Mrs. Gwynne nervously. She did not half trust him. But she need not have been afraid. He might look rather pale, but otherwise he showed little outwardly, though the world was changed for him within the last half-hour. Changed, indeed ! Yet in this every-day atmosphere it became hard to realize it. It was impossible that his hopes should have suffered shipwreck in such a calm. He looked at Mrs. Gwynne with the four teacups on the tray before her ; at the chairs against the wall, that there was no one to pull forward into comfortable disorder ; at the well-remembered pictures, once a delight, now a marvel in his eyes. The very impracticability of existing in such an atmosphere was a kind of comfort to him. "Give up painting ? Nonsense !" he said to him-

self, and almost laughed aloud at the idea. It was like a bad dream, dreadful if only it had been true.

After tea Mr. Gwynne drew his chair up to the fire, and began to talk to his son about Roman antiquities. "Yes, do get him to talk a little," Mrs. Gwynne managed to whisper as she passed behind Lance's chair. "It is good for him to have the current of his thoughts changed for a short time."

Lance looked after her, thinking, "At all events she has changed the current of my thoughts. I wonder whether she supposes it is very easy to talk when one's life has been all smashed to pieces."

But he made a great effort to fix his mind upon the Roman Capitol, and tried to explain to his father the position of the ruined temples.

"I have got some sketches of one or two of them here, by the bye." And he brought forward the portfolio he had shown Maxy in the morning.

Mr. Gwynne, however, cared little for the picturesque aspect of the Forum as it now is. His only interest was in some half-effaced inscription, about which he had a theory of his own, and he held the drawings up to the candle as if he expected to discover it copied there.

"Then you don't remember whether I am right?" he asked.

"I am not sure. I will look when I go back." He stopped suddenly, and coloured. For a moment he had forgotten, but no one took any notice; his father was absently smoothing one hand over the other, and his mother did not look up from her work.

The conversation languished after that, Lance could not think of anything more to say. Maxy was carried off to bed, and for a long time the father and son sat opposite to each other, both silent and both looking into the fire. Lance was trying to recall his conversation with his mother, and to go over it again with some attempt at calmness. Now and then he raised his eyes to

his father's face. He was changed, certainly. Such a life as he led ages a man rapidly, Owen Gwynne looked years older than he really was. He roused himself by-and-by, turned to the table, and drew the inkstand towards him.

"Are you going to write any more to-night?" asked Mrs. Gwynne, arranging the candles, however, with great alacrity.

"Only a few notes. I have been reading most of the day, not writing. By the way, here is some work for you."

It was a long translation to be made from an old Italian history.

Mrs. Gwynne summoned her son to help her. "Here, Lance, this must be just in your line, all Italian."

Lance came up to the table, and tried to do his best, but his attention would not be commanded. The little room seemed to grow hotter and hotter, and the Italian words more and more confused.

"You are tired, Lance," his mother said at last, as he stumbled over a sentence so

simple that she had translated it for herself while he was still gazing helplessly at the first word.

"Yes—no—am I?" And Lance pushed back his hair and looked at her.

"It seems so. At all events I don't think you will give me much help to-night."

"I am sorry, mother. I suppose I am stupid with travelling so many nights." But Mrs. Gwynne's head was bent over her work again, and she did not heed him.

The clock ticked loud and fast. His father's pen went scraping wearily over paper; a large fly, which resented being kept awake by the lamplight, kept on buzzing and fidgeting, and occasionally came against the window pane with a bang that worried Lance as if it had been struck against his own head; and then the rattle of the express train began again in his ears, and all his pulses seemed to be running a race with the loud clock. What a small room this was to live in! What a tedious ugly kind of room! An unreasonable feeling

came over Lance of being utterly weary of it, as if he had lived in it for months, and was longing for a change of scene.

"I wonder if I have fallen asleep, and am waking up two or three months hence," he said to himself. "I wish I were." But the loud clock struck ten in a hurried manner, and then went on ticking violently, as if it grudged the time wasted in striking, and presently Mrs. Gwynne brought her task to a triumphant conclusion.

"Why don't you go to bed, Lance, if you're tired?" she said. Lance went, but when he got into the hall he opened the front door instead, and all at once he was out in the moonlight. The rain had ceased. It was a cloudy night, and the sky was grey and troubled, though not dark. The moon shone mistily, the earth was quietly asleep, and rain-drops lay thick upon the grass.

It was in no wise a remarkable night. There was nothing particular to be said about it, except that there might be more rain to-morrow. But how wonderfully still

and sympathetic it was, after the hot lamp-light, and the loud-ticking clock, that somehow seemed to Lance to be a thing alive, and to have ranged itself against him.

And here, and now, beneath the misty moon, his battle must be fought out. Lance's nature was not one that could bear for long the agony of indecision. It was no use waiting until morning brought him calm reflection, or sleep had steadied and cleared his judgment. Now was the time when his resolution must be come to.

First came a rush of longing to get away, back to Rome, anywhere out of this miserable place. For a few minutes it swept everything before it. The difficulties seemed nothing. He imagined his talk with his mother, and the words in which she would at last acknowledge herself convinced that her plan had been a mistaken one.

And then the quick journey back to Italy. Its blue sky and golden sunshine, just flashed across his memory ; but it was

not on them that his thoughts rested. It was hard work, unremitting study, that he pictured to himself. He would toil day and night; never rest, or take holidays, or go on long sketching dawdling expeditions, as he had done hitherto. Thus only could he make up to his father and mother for choosing his own way instead of theirs. His should be no path of self-indulgence; but when could he ever need rest from his beloved art?

Lance's fancy rushed on to his first great success, his picture sold, the money sent home to Marlixtowe, orders pouring in, honour on the name of Gwynne—the name his mother so longed to hear of as famous. What could she wish more? and at that moment he felt secure in the conviction, that often well-nigh failed him, often shone but dimly and unsteadily upon him, that he had it in him to make a great painter.

He walked on as he planned, and the night laid a cold hand on his throbbing head. More grey clouds, more intense

stillness and dewy cool long grass; and then, close at hand, the calm voice of waters, rippling quietly on, with a peaceful silver music in their flow.

Lance stopped involuntarily to listen, and the stream was like a voice in the darkness. It spoke to him in no connected sentences, but to his fancy each little oncoming wave brought an image or a name. His father grown grey over his books; his mother watching him eagerly; Maxy—and at the name the river rang a strange mixed chime of mirth and sadness—little Maxy, whose face lighted up so joyously at the thought of one morning not spent all alone.

But they would all share his triumphs. His work would be for them. Would not his father be proud of his artist son, and his mother's ambitious heart be satisfied at last?

Some of the clouds passed away from the moon, and he saw the little stream gliding steadily onwards.

Would it be the same to his father that the prize, for which he had worked so patiently, should be won by another? Could his mother ever set her heart in the same way on a new object? Had she not struggled, waited, watched, borne poverty and privation, all for that—for Owen Gwynne's great work.

And Maxy—could he ever give him back the lonely years of his neglected childhood?

Lance knew that the battle was going against him, but he struggled fiercely still.

Why was he to be sacrificed, the treasure of his life torn from him, the passion of his young strong heart stifled and blighted? He had never known before what his art was to him—never. He thought of his friends, his rivals, his half-painted picture, of Austin Hope. They had asked too much of him.

And yet—and yet. In his father's time of need, from his mother's prayer could he turn away?

The minutes grew into hours. The little

waves that had first seemed to speak to him had passed far on towards the sea. The moon had shaken off the clouds that hung around her, and was mounting serenely higher into heaven. Lance did not move. The battle was over now. He had lost it—or won it.

But he was fighting no longer. He was determined, and now he said to himself that he would be content. It should be no half sacrifice that he made to duty. Lance found a sort of stern pleasure in the few hard rules he drew up for his life.

His hand should never touch a pencil. He would never, never once lie idly dreaming, letting pictures come and paint themselves before his mental eyes.

His note-book was in his pocket, half filled with rough studies and notes on painting. He took it out and launched it into the stream. A spray of diamonds sparkled up in the moonlight as the book struck the water, and then the waves took up their song again and murmured on, closing over

their spoil. "All alike : ready to accept any sacrifice with the same composure," muttered Lance.

He turned homewards, taming his impetuous long strides into an angry imitation of what he fancied a clerk's measured footsteps ought to be. He had wandered a long way, and the night was waning. When at last he entered the silent house, and noiselessly mounted the stairs, there was already a grey glimmer of coming daylight away in the eastern sky.

CHAPTER III.

MRS. GWYNNE had made an elaborate plan respecting the course of conduct which she thought Lance ought to pursue.

She mentally allowed him four-and-twenty hours for deliberation, at the expiration of which time it would behove him to come to her and tender his resignation of independence. This would take place about six o'clock in the evening. Later in the same evening she would compose, with his assistance, a letter to Messrs. Deane, bankers, making an offer of his services as clerk, and stating his qualifications for the post.

This letter would be sent in the course of the following morning, after which preliminaries would probably be arranged, and an

interview take place between Lance and his future employers.

People are not always satisfied when even their greatest wishes are attained too quickly or by an irregular road.

Mrs. Gwynne scarcely knew whether to be pleased or vexed at the summary manner in which Lance conducted his affairs. Great was her surprise when, having lost sight of him after the silent breakfast, she espied him later in the morning, coming down the steps of the Bank, as she was returning home after her daily shopping in the High Street.

Lance walked slowly, with his eyes on the ground, and would have passed his mother without seeing her if she had not crossed the street to join him. He did not look best pleased when she laid her hand upon his shoulder.

"You here, Lance! Have you been to the Bank already?"

"Yes, mother."

She waited for him to say more, but he

only added, "Are you going home?" and walked on beside her.

"Well, I must say you have not lost much time," returned Mrs. Gwynne, rather regretting the excellent business letter which she would no longer be required to write. "I am not sure that it was a wise step to go like this. Did you see Mr. Deane?"

"Yes; as it had to be done there was no use in wasting time."

"Well?"

"Oh, it is all settled. There was no difficulty. Am not I taking you out of your way?" And Lance made the slightest possible effort to release his arm.

His mother did not relinquish it. "My dear Lance," she said, with more feeling than usual in her voice. "You must let me express to you what I feel. You have acted most properly and dutifully in this matter. I was sure that you would eventually do so, as you may remember that I told you last night."

"I remember," said Lance, as she seemed to expect an answer.

"Yes, I knew you better than you knew yourself, and felt sure that right and reason would conquer your repugnance to a change of employment. At the same time I must confess that I did you less than justice. I did not expect such promptitude in action as you have shown, and I am surprised as well as gratified."

"I am glad," responded Lance wearily.

"The consciousness of having acted rightly will be your best reward," she continued. "Self-conquest brings with it a satisfaction peculiarly its own; and you have, besides, the knowledge that we fully appreciate your sacrifice. Your father will value your conduct greatly."

Lance bent his head.

"He will tell you so himself." And Mrs. Gwynne rang the door-bell of No. 4 as she spoke.

"I hope not," exclaimed Lance. "I had much rather no one said anything more about it."

“Don't you wish it? Well, perhaps it is wiser not to bring the subject too much before him, for I told you how it distressed him to interfere with your plans. It shall be as you please, Lance. Only you will understand that he feels it just as much as I do.”

“All right,” said Lance, waxing impatient; and as his mother entered the house he walked across the square lawn, and stood at the other end, with his back to the house, staring at the wall.

The consciousness of having acted rightly! The words jarred upon him even more than the rest of his mother's measured exasperating sentences. The consciousness of acting rightly—that was just what Lance had not, for the realization of his own extreme ungraciousness was his strongest feeling at that moment. To make a sacrifice at all was a small thing. He had no reason to pride himself on the spirit in which it was being carried out.

Rousing himself presently, Lance went

up to his room, took out a sheet of thin foreign paper, and resolutely sat down to accomplish what he felt to be the hardest of the many hard things he had to do—writing a letter to Austin Hope.

The first few words were written rapidly, and then came a pause, while he strove to collect his thoughts. At last he crossed his arms on the table, and laid his head down upon them, and so he remained without stirring for a long time. The sun came pouring in at the window, flooded his room, and streamed gaily across his bowed head without disturbing him. Gradually the bright light ebbed away, and still he did not stir.

He was not grieving all this time, or even actually thinking, but with the necessity for action the power had left him; he sat quietly on with a sort of stunned feeling, which at last merged itself into a sound and dreamless sleep.

When he awoke at last with a start it was to find the room nearly in darkness, the

shadows from the trees outside stretching half across the lawn, and the post-hour close at hand.

It was a relief to be forced to write briefly. The facts he had to tell were bitter enough, without adding to them comments or lamentations. But he was surprised to find how composedly he could write about them—how already the coming change was growing familiar to him, and losing its first feeling of horrible impossibility.

“Lance,” asked Maxy, that evening when they were alone together, “how long do you mean to stay at home?”

“I can’t tell, Maxy,” said Lance, laying down the book he was holding, with a sigh and a stretch.

“But you are soon going back to Rome,” continued Maxy, wistfully; “you won’t be here very much longer, I suppose?”

“Why? Are not you glad to have me at home?”

“Yes, of course—only——” Maxy paused and looked eager and doubtful.

Lance understood. He came and sat on the edge of the sofa, and said, "You see, Maxy, things don't always go straight in the world. I want you to forget all I told you about Rome, as soon as you can."

"About your being a great painter?"

"Yes; all that," said Lance. "After all, Maxy, it might never have come true."

"And you don't mean to be an artist?"

Lance shook his head. Maxy turned scarlet.

"I mean to stay at home, and try some other work here in Marlixtowe."

"Did they make you give it up?" asked Maxy, lowering his voice mysteriously.

"Who? my father and mother? No, Maxy, they could not make me. I chose it myself. There was no help for it—it had to be done; but I had rather never speak about it again."

"Very well," said Maxy, his lip quivering.

"But you want to say something now. What is it?"

"Nothing; only I am disappointed." And

Maxy suddenly burst out crying, and hid his face in the pillows of the couch.

“My dear boy,” Lance said, very much surprised; and he tried to draw Maxy towards him, but the boy resisted indignantly—

“Let me alone, Lance, I tell you.”

Lance was kneeling on one knee beside the sofa, feeling perplexed and touched, and Maxy was pushing him away with all his might, when they both heard their mother's step. In an instant Lance had flung himself into a chair and taken up a book. Maxy seized his drawing-board, and with crimsoned cheeks and wet eyelashes tried to look as if he had never cried in his life.

Mrs. Gwynne glanced from one to the other.

“Maxy, what is the matter with you?”

“Nothing, mother,” responded Maxy, with a gasping attempt to swallow his last sob.

“Hasn't he been crying?” asked Mrs. Gwynne of Lance.

"No," shouted Maxy recklessly, as his brother hesitated. Then, with rapid repentance, he added, "Yes, I have; but I don't mean to tell you why."

"I don't want to know," and Mrs. Gwynne turned to leave the room.

But Maxy drew, and Lance read perseveringly. Neither spoke again. From that time Maxy never alluded to his brother's altered life. Lance sometimes wondered whether he could possibly have forgotten all that they had talked about when he first came home, Maxy took everything thoroughly as a matter of course, and was so entirely blithe and contented.

And now for Lance began the prose of life—for it was hard prose to him at first, every bit of it. God, who in His mercy gives the flowers each summer to His world, leaves no life to be all winter, but as He "sends rain on the just and on the unjust," so to every one there comes some help when it is most needed—some colour, some blossom of happiness or of hope. But at present it was

winter for Lance, cold and hard. The change was as great and sudden in his inward as in his outward life. From Italy to England, from sunshine to the east wind and grey skies of a late spring, from his beloved easel to the high stool of a banker's clerk, and from hope to hopelessness.

He was very solitary, for excepting little Maxy there was no one whom he cared to speak to. His fellow clerks were uncongenial, and rightly or wrongly the sober people of Marlixtowe failed to interest him. Not that he felt his loneliness as a grievance, on the contrary. The ties that bound him to his artist friends were broken, and he dreaded nothing so much as meeting any of them again. As for new acquaintances, he had never been less disposed to make any. Among Mr. Deane's clerks he was considered very cold, very reserved, and very industrious. The senior clerk held him up as a model to the rest, and would have made a favourite of him if he had been less indifferent, but he only asked to be left

alone. He gave no sympathy, and he claimed none. Sometimes the remembrance crossed him of his old popularity among the artists at Rome, where, in spite of his reserve, few men were better liked than he had been. Were they still expecting him back, he wondered; and what could they have thought of his sudden disappearance? He believed that Austin Hope would never forgive him, and expected no answer to his letter, but in a short time there came, to his surprise, a long, kind, persuasive letter, very different from the curt matter-of-fact notes Austin was in the habit of writing. He used all the eloquence at his command to induce his friend to undo his fatal mistake. He even asked for the true explanation of his motives, declaring that his letter contained no good reason for such a decision, and he entreated him to do nothing in a hurry.

Lance wrote his rejoinder from his desk at the Bank :—

“DEAR AUSTIN,

“It’s no use writing me letters like that, though it’s very good of you. I cannot come back, and I have nothing more to explain.”

And there he paused, for that seemed all he had to say, but his heart warmed to his faithful friend, so after a few minutes he added, “God bless you, old fellow,” and thus signed and sealed once more his determination to renounce his old life.

The months wore away. They were too monotonous to go slowly, but they were heavy and oppressive to look back upon, and by the time the summer was half over Lance had grown to remember his life in Italy as an entirely different state of existence. “All work and no play were making Jack a dull boy,” as Jane sometimes said to herself, with a shake of the head, when she saw his impassive face, and remembered how different its expression had been when he first came home.

Lance knew no one, went nowhere, and

shared in none of the diversions of the country town. Sometimes when his work was over he took long solitary cross-country walks. They were his one amusement, if indeed amusement it could be called, of which the only object was to tire himself, and to get over the greatest possible distance in the shortest possible time. There was not a sight within twenty miles of Marlixtowe that he did not visit that summer—not a ruin, bosky wood, brawling waterfall, old church, or modern factory. It mattered to him very little that he often arrived when it was too dark to see the object of his walk. He was in no humour for studying the picturesque, and by this time he had got over the habit of feeling in his coat pocket for his sketch-book, whenever the sunshine came filtering through the leaves with a peculiarly enticing tracery of light and shade, or when steep lane, untidy cottage, and ragged fir-tree formed themselves into a ready-made picture.

Once or twice he went to Stone Cross by a wild, rough foot-path, that crossed heaths,

and went by stepping-stones over streams, zigzagged up rugged cliffs, and thought nothing of hedges and ditches and stone walls. Like a man undeterred by difficulties, the little path went steadily onwards, and if an obstacle crossed its way got over it somehow, and was found again, narrow but persistent, on the other side.

Lance had known it well in his school days, when it was the favourite short cut to forbidden Marlixtowe. The track still ended abruptly under the playground wall, in a distant corner where a few top stones were loose. He got over the wall one evening when he knew that the boys were all away for the holidays, and went to look in at the school-room window.

There was the big bare room, the floor worn by many shuffling feet, the walls dingier still than they had been in his day. Lance looked for his old desk, and almost fancied he could see on it the deeply cut letters of his own name. It was sitting there that he had made up his mind to be

an artist, and dreamed his first dream of a great success.

The twilight came on rapidly and stopped his reminiscences. Lance dropped down again on to the grass, feeling very old, and as if all of life that was worth having lay behind him. He went home by the high road that night, and chewed the sweet and bitter cud of his school memories all the way.

One of the figures belonging to that time which the sight of the old schoolroom brought back to him the most vividly, was that of a former usher of his father's, John Rutherford by name, with whom he had always been a favourite.

Mr. Rutherford was an old man, and was supposed in the school to have known better days. He was kind and learned, and Lance, who always took to people much older than himself, spent much of his time with him. To his ears the boy's artistic aspirations used to be confided, and the old usher listened with unfeigned sympathy, prophesying great things for the future. Lance

presently found out that he was still living in Marlixtowe, and an impulse came over him to seek out his old friend and tell him what ruin had befallen those fair castles in the air.

John Rutherford remembered him well, and welcomed him with all his former affection. He was spending his last days alone, and was almost crippled with rheumatism, but time had only printed more strongly on his face the look of simple kindness and serenity which Lance recollected. It was impossible not to respond to his heartfelt interest, and sitting alone with him one evening, Lance told him his story. He told of the bright hopes of his Roman days, of their sudden downfall; then of the dreary drudgery of his present life, which, however, he was determined to bear without flinching, carrying out his sacrifice unfalteringly to the very end.

"I will never draw back," he said.

"It is very grand," said Mr. Rutherford after a minute's silence, "very grand."

It was quietly spoken, so quietly that Lance looked up quickly to see if there was any sarcasm hidden behind the words, but the kind old face looked only simple and interested.

“Very grand,” he repeated again. “But do you think you are able to do it?”

“I think so,” answered Lance, drawing back his head with a resolute gesture peculiar to himself. His hearer remembered it well.

“Ah! you think so. I used to be like you. I used to think I was strong enough for anything. But I have changed my mind. I have found—I have been taught rather—that I am not strong enough for anything alone.”

He paused and looked at the young man, who made no answer.

So John Rutherford had a story too,—a story with a moral. Lance did not ask to hear it, nor did his old friend offer to tell it to him “as a warning.” Perhaps he knew human nature too well. It is surely a strange mode of consolation, when people

are in the absorbing interest of a living present trouble, to drag them back by force into the middle of some long past story, some mistake made, some experience dearly bought half a life time ago.

Who can care about it? It is over. The pain was suffered, the tears were shed, the irrevocable words were spoken, perhaps before the unwilling listener was born. Who will learn out of another's lesson book? Who can call the past back from the land of shadows? What good does the story do? The listener hears it out with what patience he may, and goes back to his own need. And yet it is a favourite mode of giving comfort, and doubtless it is consoling—to him who tells the tale.

John Rutherford was wiser. He only thought for a few minutes, and then repeated meditatively his former words: "We learn that we cannot be strong enough alone. We just have to begin again, unless we find strength greater than our own to fight with. I suppose St. Paul was as

strong as you or I, yet he talks of his weakness—eh, Gwynne?”

“Certainly,” said Lance, bending his head gravely.

“Ah! you know it. I wish, my boy, that you believed it in such a way that the knowledge need not come to you hardly and painfully, as it has to me.

“Get the strength St. Paul had, that is all,” resumed the old man, “then there need be no fears; but without that—” He shook his head.

They were good and true words, though they rang discordantly in Lance's ears. “He wanted sympathy,” he said to himself, “and not discouraging advice.” He got up presently, and wished his old tutor good-night.

“He is a good fellow,” he thought, as he walked down the street; “but he doesn't understand, how should he? I must fight my battle my own way.”

Perhaps it was Lance who did not understand—Lance, who in his proud conscious-

ness of strength, had gone out to fight the battle in armour he had not proved.

“Poor dear boy,” said John Rutherford to himself, when he was left alone—“poor dear boy! As brave as David; as ready to fight the giant, but not so wise, not so humble. I fear there may be a defeat in store for him before he is willing to put away the armour wherein he trusts, and to take up the humble sling and the pebbles from the brook.”

It might be so; for Lance felt that his life was getting harder than it had been at first. It was like the beginning of a voyage, treacherously quiet. Have not most people known what it is to be in the cabin of a vessel, waiting for the dreaded turning of the paddle-wheels? You don't know what is going on overhead, you only hear bells and the trampling of feet, and loud voices on the deck, as you wait in ignorance and resignation for what fate and the waves have in store for you.

Then suddenly all grows quiet. The

scream with which the steam has been making its way out of the chimney ceases. Instead, comes a steady, rushing sound—an imperceptible gliding. “We are off,” says somebody, and, looking at the dancing reflection cast through the porthole from the water upon the opposite wall, you see that the waves seem slipping backwards. “How quiet and smooth! How well I am bearing it!” you say, and just then the boat shivers and falls down an unfathomable precipice over the top of the first breaker.

So it was with Lance.

He found, with surprise, that the voyage had begun, the wrench was over, the deed was done, and he was still alive. He could talk and do his work, and go through his daily routine with great composure. He thought he was getting over his seasoning capitally, when suddenly up rose a great wave of bitter regret, and dashed him down helpless into the very slough of despond. He passed through his ordeal quite silently.

To draw back was impossible ; to complain would be unmanly.

But when he came out again, his strong nerves were shaken, much of his fire quenched, and the buoyancy of his youth gone from him for ever.

Maxy was at this time his greatest comfort. The two brothers unwittingly saved each other. Lance had never yet loved anything as he did this little, frail, bright-hearted being who adored him. The knowledge that his mere presence brought to Maxy the fulness of content reacted on himself. He was very rarely gloomy when he was with his brother.

And it was simply new life to Maxy ; his narrow existence was suddenly made broad, his empty heart filled to overflowing. The once lonely hours were laden with expectation, and every evening Lance's returning step brought the colour to his cheeks.

"Why, you are really getting on, my boy!" the doctor said to him with pleased surprise.

"Of course," responded Maxy, chuckling inwardly at the mere idea of not getting on when he had Lance at home.

It was worth something to have brought joy and colour into a life so barren. To make Maxy happy became his brother's greatest interest. It was not a hard task. Lance had taken his measure, and knew how to keep him amused with a store of quaint sayings and odd stories that were hidden away in some recess of his grave nature. Rarely smiling himself, he liked to hear Maxy's peals of merriment. Mrs. Gwynne might and did say "Hush" at some of the boy's shouts of laughter, but surely they would have rung like silver in the hearts of most mothers.

Meanwhile the great work went ponderously on its way. It demanded vast sacrifices of time and thought and toil, consumed cart-loads of foolscap paper, and remorselessly took up long, bright summer days, and nights from which it banished sleep. It printed deep crows-feet in the

corners of Owen Gwynne's eyes, and exercised Mrs. Gwynne in the virtues of hopefulness and patience.

For the great work had its caprices—its hot and cold fever fits, during which it alternately lifted up its author and his wife to heights of bliss that seemed well-nigh within their grasp, or let them shiver forlornly on the cold verge of despair.

“My dear,” Mr. Gwynne would say one day—“my dear, I have good news for you. I have been looking over my work this morning, and am pretty well satisfied. In fact, I see no reason, I really don't,—unless something quite unforeseen occurs,—I see no reason why it should not be out by Christmas year.”

Mrs. Gwynne did not exult openly, but a faint spot of colour rose in her sallow cheek, and she gave a little gasp of satisfaction.

“Yes, I think we may fairly look for that. I do indeed,” resumed Mr. Gwynne, diving

rapidly first into one drawer and then into another. "And what is more, in my opinion, the book will do. It appears to me to be good and new. It doesn't read badly. I don't know of any previous writer who has gone over my ground. In fact, my dear, there's matter here," bringing his hand heavily down on to a pile of manuscript,—"Matter!"

"There's little doubt of that," said Mrs. Gwynne.

"I see my way now, I think. Yes, Christmas year. I give myself till then; but that's about the date, you will find. After that, my dear, I shall put myself in your hands. You are a business woman. A poor bookworm knows nothing of bargaining. You must settle that. I shall have done my part.

"It is a very serious business," said Mrs. Gwynne.

"Well, I give you fair warning. You may be beginning to look about you. I myself might be inclined to give my old

publishers a turn; but I shan't interfere. It's your business, not mine."

"Of course it requires a great deal of consideration."

"Doubtless; but you have some time before you—Christmas year. And now you mustn't keep me talking. If I am to fulfil my share of the bargain, you must leave me undisturbed as much as possible. If you like to glance over these sheets, I think you will be rather pleased." And Mrs. Gwynne sat down patiently to glance over some dozen pages of her own handwriting, which she had revised, copied, recopied, and punctuated, until she could have reproduced them easily from memory, without the omission of a comma.

But there was a reverse side to the shield. "It is not always May," the month of promise.

There were days when Mrs. Gwynne's heart sunk within her. She had learnt by experience to read quickly the signs of a collapse. The closed drawers, and unlittered

aspect of the study table; the spectacles pushed up on to the top of Mr. Gwynne's head; his ruffled hair, and the meek look of deprecation with which he met her glance as she opened the study door, were to her tokens as clear as any words.

"You have had no interruptions to-day, Owen. I trust you have made progress."

"Well, my dear, I can't say. I am afraid—in point of fact, no. I have not done as much to-day as I could wish." And Mr. Gwynne laid hold nervously on one forlorn blotted sheet of paper, and tried to shuffle it away.

"Is that all your work?" asked Mrs. Gwynne, pointing to it inexorably.

"All? No, certainly not; at least—Really you—you are unreasonable. One can't be always writing," said the poor author, his patience fairly giving way.

"But only those few lines all day?"

"Well, if you will have it, only those few lines all day, and they are soon disposed of," said Mr. Gwynne, tearing the paper

into small pieces, and hastily scattering them on to the fire.

"Owen!" called Mrs. Gwynne, and she seized the tongs and caught at the shriveling fragments as if they were bank-notes.

Mr. Gwynne seated himself by the fireplace with a short laugh, and beat his hand upon his knee.

"Why did you do that?" asked his wife, facing him tongs in hand.

"I've been thinking seriously of doing the same with the whole of it," said Mr. Gwynne. "Upon my word, I believe it's all it's good for. Jane had better have it to light the fire with. It would be a weight off my mind."

"This is idle talking," she said steadily. "I am glad to know that you don't mean what you are saying."

"Indeed, then, you know a great deal more than I know myself. I do mean what I have said. It is not the first time, either, that I have thought of giving it all up. I should have done it long since if it had

not been for you. The book is not worth all the sacrifices we have made for it."

"Owen!"

"I tell you it is not. Besides, the labour is too much for me. I wonder how much you know of the research it entails; and then you expect it to be written straight off like a twopenny-halfpenny novel."

"I am sorry I spoke as I did," said Mrs. Gwynne quite gently. "Only sometimes the waiting seems rather long."

"There you are again—so like a woman. The waiting rather long! Well, you will have no waiting at all when the book is destroyed. It will be the simplest in every way; and then Lance can go back to his painting, and we shall not have his doleful looks always before us."

"Indeed, you needn't trouble yourself about Lance," said Mrs. Gwynne; "he is doing remarkably well."

She had seen her mistake ere this, and was keenly repenting it, the more so that it was one not easily repaired. For nearly

half an hour she sat by the study fire, waiting and watching her opportunity, and barely answering the bitter sentences by which her husband was unconsciously working off his fit of weariness.

When she saw that the moment had come, she set to work with wonderful patience, and with a tact that was not natural to her, but was taught her by intense anxiety, to rekindle slowly and carefully the dying lamp of his ambition.

“Would it not be wrong that the world should be allowed to lose such a work as this would be?”

“It would be no loss,” sharply returned Mr. Gwynne.

She let that pass, and went on talking. She spoke of authors who had succeeded—Owen wrote better than they did; of authors who had failed—how entirely Owen had avoided their mistakes; and by degrees Owen was brought to acknowledge that he once thought he had done so. She turned the conversation cunningly to passages in

his book which she knew to be his favourites, and asked leading questions about them. She praised, with delicate praise, his industry, his perseverance under difficulties—just those points in which he felt that he had failed, and so she enlisted his vanity on her side. Then she spoke of final success as certain, unheeding his depressed attitude and repeated shakes of the head. And she sketched in the outline of one or two castles in the air that it would almost have broken his heart to relinquish.

At last he lifted his head and answered. No matter though it was only to throw scorn on her pleasant assertions. That gave her an opportunity of repeating them more strongly. She saw directly when he began to wish her to contradict him. He gave melancholy superior smiles, and said women little knew. His wife cordially admitted that.

“As to success,” continued Mr. Gwynne, “it depends very little on the intrinsic value of a book. It’s all luck and favouritism.”

Still Mrs. Gwynne was not to be daunted. She returned quietly to the charge, and by-and-by Mr. Gwynne was induced to go back to the study table, unfold his manuscript, and read aloud one or two of the passages she had been praising. When she saw him stop to make a note on the margin, Mrs. Gwynne drew a long breath of relief. Her work was nearly done, but though it would be unwise to let him write any more this evening, he must leave off with a fresh idea in his head, that would make him eager to begin working the next morning.

This was presently brought about.

"After all, one can but fail," said Mr. Gwynne, with a sigh that was no longer despairing.

Then Mrs. Gwynne went away to her own room, and sat down beside the empty fireplace, utterly worn out.

The escape had been very narrow; her victory had been hardly won—hardly won, laborious, exhausting. She must be careful not to run such a risk again. All was

safe this time, but was there no truth in what Owen Gwynne had said? Did he not see some things clearly at that moment when all the glamour of self-deception had gone from him? Would success indeed come at last? and would it be worth all this struggle?

Yes; it should be—it must be. She must not give way to any such weakness as this. She, at least, must never be found faltering or doubting till the end had come.

And yet Mrs. Gwynne sighed.

CHAPTER IV.

ONE day in the following spring Lance, coming home at one o'clock, found Maxy flushed and eager, bursting with some tidings.

"Your friends have come, Lance," he called out as soon as the door was opened. "They have both been here to see you. They could not wait, but they will come again."

"Who will come—who is it?" asked Lance, coming in with his usual listless step.

"Nigel Ruthven," answered Maxy, "and Austin Hope. They were afraid I should forget their names, but I knew I shouldn't."

And they sent their love. They are great friends of yours, Lance, they said." The last words were spoken questioningly, for Lance's face did not express any special gladness at the thought of seeing his great friends.

"Austin Hope here?" he said.

"Yes, and Nigel Ruthven, too. You are glad, Lance, are not you?"

"No," answered Lance abruptly.

He sat down, and then got up, and walked to the window. Maxy sat upright and watched him wonderingly.

"Dear me," he said, half aloud, "and they seemed so fond of Lance, and so sorry he was out, and sure that he would be glad they were come."

"Of all people in the world," thought Lance, looking out into the Abbey Road—"of all people in the world, Austin Hope! Is one never to be left alone? Is the old wound never to heal over? Is it all to be dragged out again, and talked over, and discussed, and wondered at? Is one to be

argued with, and asked for explanations, and misunderstood, and badgered, and tortured? Why can't they leave one in peace? Austin Hope, too! If it had been only Nigel, who hasn't got it in him to care really about art or anything else, but Austin, with his dogged one-sidedness—what on earth can bring him here unless he has come after me!"

Lance stood at the window, and Maxy watched him, puzzled and disappointed.

"Lance," said his mother coming in, "there have been two young men here asking for you."

"So Maxy tells me," said Lance, slowly turning round.

"They are Italian painters, are not they?" asked Mrs. Gwynne.

"No. They are both Englishmen."

"Ah, well, artists, I suppose?"

"Yes," answered Lance, looking at his mother.

If she had seemed disquieted by the visit of his artist-friends, links with the old life,

he would probably have felt injured and indignant at her want of trust in him ; but he was perverse, and her genuine indifference, her perfect security and unconsciousness of all that it was so hard for him to bear, ruffled him still more.

"They won't trouble you, mother," he said quietly.

And she answered as quietly, "Oh, no. You had better go out to see them: it might disturb your father to have them coming here."

"Are you sorry they came, Lance?" asked Maxy, when his mother had left the room.

"I wish they were at Jericho," said Lance.

"Then look here," continued Maxy, with his usual quick acquiescence in circumstances he did not understand. "Can't you go off to Daneswood or somewhere directly the Bank shuts, and when they come I can say you are out?"

"Certainly not," answered Lance.

"What good would that do? You don't suppose I mean to shirk seeing them?"

"Oh, I didn't know," said Maxy, without a shade of annoyance on his face, though it was very seldom that Lance spoke to him so sharply.

In the afternoon, as Lance turned into the High Street on his way home, he saw his two friends some way in front, sauntering along in the pale spring sunshine, and evidently waiting for him.

There was no time for embarrassment. Lance quickened his pace to overtake them, for the moment feeling nothing but pleasure at the sight of the familiar figures, so strongly recalling Rome, that it seemed odd to see them in the broad, clean street of an English country town. But there was Nigel staring in at the shop windows, and Austin Hope walking by his side with slow meditative strides and his eyes on the ground.

The meeting was a very cordial one on all sides. Whatever remonstrances Austin

Hope might have in store for Lance, he said nothing about them now, only shook hands warmly, asked questions, and told Roman news just as heartily as in the good old times.

"He was staying for a couple of days with Nigel," he said in answer to his friend's inquiries; "and he had come to Marlixtowe on business. Lance should hear about it later," he added, with a momentary glance that told Lance a good deal of what he had to expect. He went on to say "that he was on his way to Norway to fish and sketch after rather a hard winter's work."

"And you, Nigel?" asked Lance.

Nigel, it appeared, had not done anything particular, but he was going to work hard; and he had come home to see his people. Was it possible that Lance had never found out that his father now possessed a house—a queer, out-of-the-way, little old place, within three or four miles of Marlixtowe, that had been left him by an uncle lately dead?

"After wandering about Europe for the last twenty years, he is trying to live in it, poor man," said Nigel. "He finds it hard work; but you are coming home with us now to judge for yourself."

Lance had an engagement, but promised to pay them a visit, foreign fashion, in the evening. "Hope does not mean to favour us with his company long," said Nigel; "so pray come, if you don't mind the darkest lanes in England."

"Has he been working at all?" asked Lance, as Nigel turned into a shop, leaving the two others alone for a minute.

Austin laughed. "Not he. He says he is going to do something wonderful now, but of course he won't. He'll dawdle at home all the summer, I expect. His father's house is the most picturesque little nest of a place I ever saw; and his sister—have you ever seen her?"

"Never! is she like him?"

"I should like to have the painting of her, that's all.

"All right, Nigel; I'm ready. Mind you come as early as you can, Lance. *A rivederci.*"

"Wonderfully gracious," thought Lance, as he looked after them, "but I don't trust him."

It was raining and very dark that evening when Lance, having lost himself several times among the intricate lanes between Marlixtowe and the Old Bridge House, stood at last in a deep porch, rang a jangling bell, and smelt a scent of violets.

He could see little, except a rising height that seemed to be covered with wood, behind him, and in front the ground fell away suddenly towards what Lance judged must be the river. "A lonely place," he thought, "I suppose it is the right house." Apparently it was, for he was presently admitted into a dimly lighted little hall. Then another door was opened and showed Lance an oak-wainscoted room that struck him with an immediate sense of old-fashioned brightness. It was not much

bigger than the square parlour at home, but it was quaintly shaped and full of odd nooks and corners. In a deep recess, raised two steps from the floor, was a long, many-latticed window. A high tile-lined chimney-piece filled another recess, and was made beautiful just now by a glowing wood fire.

Scattered about were baskets and jars of flowers and greenery, and there were plenty of bright colours harmoniously blended. True, the Turkey carpet was worn threadbare, and the red baize cushions in the raised window seat were faded yellow by the sun; but somehow, the room looked none the worse for that.

There were four people gathered in front of the ruddy hearth. Austin Hope was playing backgammon with a slight, grey-haired man, and playing very badly, for he had lost every game, though his antagonist was only giving half attention, being more intent on admiring his son Nigel than in making points and covering his blots.

Nigel stood by the chimney-piece, playing sweet melancholy old airs on the violin, making it sigh and sing, and tell without words the stories of its songs.

Lastly, a girl sat in a high-backed chair, shadowed by the heavy mantelpiece, with a spinning-wheel before her, and the red fire-glow catching her cheek, her raised hand, and the heavy woollen folds of her blue gown.

"Austin was right," thought Lance, as he stood for a minute looking in upon them; and then Nigel turned round, and they all got up to greet him.

The backgammon and the talk, and music went on in an easy lazy way after Lance had been made welcome.

"You have improved, Nigel," said his sister approvingly, as he stopped playing.

"Ah!" he answered, with one or two soft parting chords, "after all, there's nothing like it in the world. Ursula, sometimes I think I have mistaken my profession."

"Nigel!" exclaimed Ursula indignantly.

"Nigel is always thinking he has mis-

taken his profession," said Austin Hope quietly. "What was it you wished to be the other day at Paris—a doctor, wasn't it?"

"Well," said Nigel, "I only talk of changing, and there is Lance Gwynne has done it in earnest. Why don't you call him to account?"

Lance glanced involuntarily at his friend, but Austin never turned his eyes in his direction.

He moved away from the backgammon board presently, and said to Ursula, "I wish you would just stay as you are for a couple of minutes, you would make such a good study." And he took a note-book from his pocket and began to draw rapidly.

Ursula sat still, looking patient and a little bored, as people generally do when they are being made into studies.

"May I go on spinning?" she asked resignedly.

"Of course."

Nigel laid down his violin. "Always at it," he said to Austin.

"Just stand out of my light, will you? Ah, what a bore! the fire is going down, and I wanted to get that clear light."

Nigel drew the logs together, and blew them into a blaze, and then went behind his friend to look. Finally, he got a bit of paper and began to draw also.

Old Captain Ruthven looked on admiringly.

"Now, Lance," said Nigel, "better try too."

"No, thank you," said Lance.

"Then keep the fire going, there's a good fellow. The bellows are on the hearth. Don't blow too hard."

Lance did as he was told, knelt down and blew softly.

"This is rather hard on you," said Ursula, looking down at him.

"It's all in the service of art," observed Nigel.

Lance did not look up, but blew the bellows sedulously.

No one spoke for a few minutes.

"I beg your pardon for keeping you waiting so long, Captain Ruthven," said Austin at last, "but that effect of light was so good it would have been a pity to lose it."

"Of course—of course—undoubtedly."

Captain Ruthven was a blind and awe-struck worshipper of art. He watched Austin's fingers reverently, mechanically replacing the pieces on the backgammon board meanwhile.

"I shall be ready in one moment now."

"No sort of hurry, my dear sir."

"There——"

"May I see?" said Ursula. "Oh, is that all?"

"Quite enough for me, thank you very much." And Austin returned to his game.

Lance had risen and was standing with his back to the fire.

"Wish me good luck, Miss Ruthven," said Austin, as Ursula stood for a moment behind her father's chair to watch the game. "I have been beaten so often."

"Not I," Ursula answered gaily. "My sympathy is all for success."

Somehow the careless words cut Lance to the quick. Why had he come here, where they were all so happy and light-hearted, to overshadow them with the gloom of a disappointed man. And why did this girl, with the soft brown eyes, pronounce against him so lightly the world's hard verdict against the unsuccessful?

It was a disappointment to Captain Ruthven that evening that neither of his guests could be induced to talk about pictures. Hard as he strove to guide the conversation into an artistic channel, one of the others, either thoughtlessly or by design, invariably caused it to flow back again into the current of every day topics. Even Austin Hope refused to improve the shining hour, and embarked in an endless discussion about Italian politics. Captain Ruthven was in despair. His devotion to art was without limit. It was zeal not according to knowledge, for it had come to him late in life,

and had grown up from his intensely sympathetic nature, and his love to his son Nigel.

To tell the real truth, David Ruthven knew nothing in the world about pictures, though his greatest ambition was to be thought a good judge of them. He deceived himself, as carefully as he strove to deceive others; not from vanity—he was as simple-hearted as a child—but because he could not bear to be out of sympathy with those he cared for. Besides, he fancied that Nigel would trust and look up to him more if he shared with him his enthusiasm for his chosen calling.

So, during the years he had spent abroad, wandering from one foreign city to another, Captain Ruthven worked very hard. He walked conscientiously through miles of picture gallery, and laboriously learnt by heart the names and works of the old masters. A visit to a new gallery was always an anxious time to him, for he was secretly afraid of admiring the wrong

pictures, or, still worse, of not finding out the right ones. With wistful eyes he watched the looks and gestures of happy self-confident judges; and he never failed honestly to admire anything in which it became clear to him he ought to see beauty.

In all this he flattered himself that he was taking Nigel in; and not for the world would Nigel have undeceived the dear old father. But his own taste was not always orthodox. To see him rave about some obscure fresco ignored by Vasari, and pass by a picture of world-wide renown with doubtful half-patronizing approval, filled David Ruthven with a mixture of bewilderment and admiration. Besides, Nigel was not constant to his objects of enthusiasm, so his father often had to recant his opinions as soon as they were formed. But this was quickly done. A shrug of the shoulders, a shake of the head, a few words of faint praise from Nigel or one of his friends, and it was singular how quickly the glamour

faded from the picture, and its faults revealed themselves to Captain Ruthven's eyes.

Of course it was a weakness, but not quite an unlovable one. His simplicity, humility, and longing still to influence and share the interests of the beloved son made it almost pathetic.

Lookers-on thought it strange that the son should come before such a daughter as Ursula in his love, but so it was. Ursula knew it, and was content. The knowledge had grown up with her from childhood. Nigel was the idol of his father's heart, though he was often disappointed in him. He did not think his son faultless, for in idolatry there must ever be a lack of rest, and the sense of something wanting; but he loved him with that large love that hopeth and believeth all things.

Nigel was very different from Lance's other friend, Austin Hope. Austin was an artist by the right divine of nature; Nigel from circumstances, and also by descent on his mother's side.

She was the daughter of a well-known French landscape painter, whom David Ruthven, home on furlough from India, and wandering about France, had grown to know at Avignon.

In those days Achille la Grange's atelier was one of the lions of the town, as well known to all the *laquais de place* of Avignon as the Palais des Papes itself. Every traveller was sent to visit it, and David Ruthven, then a young man, but already a painstaking and conscientious tourist, took it in his round of sight-seeing as a matter of course.

It was one of the odd unexpected chances on which a whole life turns. He came in one day from the glaring sunny street into the shaded studio. No one was there but the artist himself, who speedily discerning that his visitor was not a connoisseur, took no further heed of him after a courteous greeting. He went on painting, and David Ruthven, a little bored and rather awe-struck at his silent industry, went softly round the atelier. Finally he stood still for so long a

time that the painter, missing the sound of his footsteps, looked round carelessly to see which of his works had arrested the young Englishman's attention. He was not looking at a picture at all, but was standing at a window that opened upon the court behind the house, and which was one of those picturesque quiet places in which southern houses abound. A fountain trickled pleasantly, some orange-trees and cactuses stood ranged in tubs. The sun shone softly through a trellice of vine leaves. In front of the trellice there was a moss-covered stone bench and table, shadowed by a big plane-tree.

Monsieur la Grange came, brush in hand, and glanced over the young man's shoulder. Not much to look at, surely. He saw a peasant woman in clattering sabots going to the fountain with a pitcher balanced on her head. He also saw his wife—stout, bustling, and good-humoured—carrying an enormous basket heaped up with grapes and golden melons. A solemn poodle, shaved

into an unsuccessful burlesque of a lion, marched at her side gravely, but glanced back out of the corners of his eyes at Claire, the painter's daughter. She was slyly stealing grapes over her mother's shoulder, and making a sign of silence to the poodle, who, though viewing the matter in a serious light, had evidently decided on not betraying her.

David Ruthven had come to see pictures. Well, he had found one that pleased him, and he carried its memory with him to his grave.

He started when M. La Grange touched his shoulder, and muttered something about the splendid fruit. The old Frenchman was good-natured. His visitor, poor young man, clearly knew nothing about painting, but he had a pleasant face.

"You love grapes?" he said. "*Allons!* my wife shall give us some."

That was the beginning. Claire la Grange was the darling of the household. All her life she had been her father's model, critic,

plaything. She haunted his atelier like a sunbeam, and played merry tricks on the old artists—Monsieur la Grange's compeers. Everybody loved her; even Malbrook, the poodle, pitied her childishness and forgave her, though it was her fault that half his life was passed on his hind legs, with a palette on one paw, and a mahl stick against his shoulder.

No one but the shrewd though kindly mother had begun to realize that at seventeen years old a *parti* ought to be sought for Claire. David Ruthven was not much of a *parti*, but he was richer than the young art students, who had nothing, her mother said, to endow her with but their knapsacks and their bad pictures. Besides, Claire liked him.

Yet there were dark days at Avignon when she had gone to India with her English husband. They need not have grudged him his great happiness, poor fellow; it did not last very long. Just a few cloudless years, and then the oft-re-

peated Indian troubles. Claire and her little children fell ill, and were ordered home. Captain Ruthven could not go with them, for there was fighting going on at that time, and besides, he must work for his pension.

So the bitter parting came, and was soon over. David Ruthven took his wife on board, and watched the treasure-laden ship go slowly out to sea. The light of his life went with it.

But the sun, when it sets on one side of the world rises on the other. It was like a new sunrise to the old people at Avignon, when their darling, with her golden-haired boy and the baby Ursula, came back to her father's house.

Yet a few more years of hard work and fighting out in India and Captain Ruthven was wounded in a skirmish, invalided, and pensioned. Never was a wound more welcome. He sailed for home in overflowing joy and hope. But he was too late for one thing—just for one.

Poor David Ruthven ! Tears and broken words greeted him at Avignon. Claire—it had been a short illness—an angel, they said, now prayed for him in heaven. Only three weeks ago they had lain Claire in her grave.

They gave him a paper on which she had tried to trace a few words of comfort and farewell. “The good God bless thee, my friend,” she wrote in the English that she had never learnt to speak easily. “I leave thee ; but there are great consolations, and our boy——” There her strength failed. The pencil dropped on to the floor.

Tears and kisses had since then obliterated the faint pencil marks ; but David Ruthven still kept the folded paper, and the boy became to him a ‘great consolation.’

They said he bore his sorrow very quietly. After the manner of his nation, he spoke little, and seemed chiefly to care about being left alone.

On the morning after his return, the door was pushed open, and his two children appeared hand in hand, old Malbrook the

poodle pacing solemnly between them. Ursula, poor little maiden, came in, bright and unconscious, to show her new frock to the stranger, and going straight up to him, held up the little black petticoat joyfully before his eyes.

Nigel put it aside gravely. "Mother sent her love," he said, as if delivering a message. "She said——"

The boy stopped and hesitated. It was partly shyness, partly fright at the strong convulsive clasp that was laid upon his shoulder; perhaps, too, a sudden memory of the weak voice that had taught him his message. He faltered, and then flinging himself on to the floor, buried his face in the woolly part of Malbrook, and sobbed passionately.

His father picked him up and held him against his breast. "Nigel," he whispered presently. "Hush, Nigel; I am sorry, too, though I can't cry."

Half an hour afterwards Nigel was going round the garden, talking eagerly, with his

hand clasped tightly in his father's. He had forgotten his stormy grief, but David Ruthven remembered it.

It is easy to guess how Nigel drifted into being an artist. The old painter and his wife dearly loved their grandchildren, and as long as they lived Captain Ruthven would not leave Avignon.

So Nigel and Ursula grew up among pictures and painters, as their mother had done. They had great games of *cache-cache* among the dusty frames in the atelier, and their play was of artists, and sitters, and picture-dealers. No little girl in Avignon had such a doll as the lay-figure that Ursula dragged hither and thither from the time she was half its size.

To each of them the artistic temperament had in some measure descended. Ursula could not draw; but in heart, and eye, and taste, she was an artist. Nigel had great mechanical facility, plenty of imagination, and an eye for colour. His crude attempts at drawing were received with enthusiasm.

His grandfather nearly shed tears over his first portrait—a sketch of poor Malbrook, one part of whose body was painted boldly in Chinese white, the other in pink madder. Of course Nigel soon declared that he would be an artist, and nothing else.

Austin Hope had not grown up in such a bed of roses. No one had the wish or the power to oppose his choice of a profession, which was perhaps fortunate, for opposition would have made little difference to him. But he had been left to make his own way in the world. Now, after a hard struggle, fortune was beginning to smile on him, and he took her smiles as calmly as her frowns. Success was nothing to him in comparison with the attainment of his ideal; and as it was always growing higher, he seemed to himself as far from the goal as ever.

It was his uncompromising criticism that Lance had most dreaded encountering, but he knew that Austin would not let him off.

“Can't we have a walk to-morrow,” he

asked, when they were parting that evening. "It is my last day here, and I want half a dozen words with you."

"Without the benefit of my company, I suppose?" said Nigel, laughing.

"Just so," returned Austin Hope. "Where shall I meet you, Lance?"

Lance made an appointment not with the best grace in the world, and the next afternoon, when the Bank closed, he found his friend waiting for him on the steps.

"Well, Austin," said Lance, taking the bull by the horns, as they left the High Street behind them, "I haven't heard yet what brought you to Marlixtowe."

"You," answered Austin briefly.

Then Lance saw that he was in for it, and set himself to meet the attack. He would not ask any question to help on his friend, but merely uttered a commonplace "Really!"

"You know that as well as I do," said Austin. "You know I came to look after you; so don't humbug."

"I don't see what is the good of it," answered Lance.

"I mean to hear the rights of the case," continued Austin, "and to try and enter into your view of it—if that is possible," he added as an after-thought.

"I dare say it isn't possible for you," said Lance.

"You mean that you are inexcusable. So I thought."

"I mean nothing of the sort, but I do not expect you to enter into the motives which have influenced me, and I should really be much obliged if you would leave me alone."

"So I will presently, when I know the rights of it; but I have come a long way to see after you, and I am not going away without trying at least to come to an understanding with you."

They had left the high road by this time, and had turned into a lane with flowery hedges, where there was nothing to disturb them but an occasional rabbit scuttling

across their path, or a brace of partridges whirring up from the field beyond.

It was a little while before Lance answered. He was touched by the interest Austin showed in him, and felt that he owed him some confidence in return. But he felt also that it was hopeless to come to an understanding as his friend proposed. Austin would not, perhaps could not, take any but his own view of the subject.

What was the use of argument between two people both of whose minds were unalterably made up? Neither would convince the other. Lance knew, besides, that he had but the sheer force of his will to oppose to Austin. In heart and soul, in conviction and sympathy, he sided with him. Austin must not guess at the passion of regret, longing, almost of remorse, that he was trying to hide just then under an indifferent manner. He must go on appearing worldly-wise and reasonable, even when Austin's words, hot as they became as the discussion went on, hardly seemed strong enough to express his own feeling.

"Well, Austin," he said, after a few moments' debate with himself. "I must say again that I wish you had been content to leave this alone, though it's awfully good of you to care so much about my concerns. Of course, I feel that. And I'll tell you how it came about if you wish it, only I know that it will make no difference to you, and it's a subject I hate myself."

"Well, go on," said Austin.

"I must go back to the time when I left you in Italy and came home, if you will have it," said Lance, with an impatient sigh; and then he described it all, and explained the circumstances that had made it impossible for him to disregard his mother's appeal.

Austin listened very attentively, only saying "Well?" every now and then, and asking, "Is that all?" when Lance finished.

"Isn't it enough?" asked Lance.

"No. Now listen to me."

Lance did listen. It was just as he had

expected. Austin ignored the necessity that had been upon him, and launched into a vehement appeal to him to return to his true vocation. In a short time he would be able to give his people plenty of help, he said, and so disposed cursorily of that side of the question. In the meantime, did he know what he was sacrificing in giving up art? Lance tried to speak, but Austin stopped him. By every means in his power he tempted his friend. He repeated things that had been said of him by great men at Rome; men, at the bare mention of whose names Lance metaphorically raised his cap from his head. To hear that they had spoken of his powers with praise, and of his absence with wonder, made the blood rush up hotly into his cheeks.

Recalling the past, and picturing a still brighter future, Austin tried to work on Lance by the remembrance of his glowing hopes, the consciousness of his undeveloped power, the greatness of the art to which the service of his life had once been pledged.

He had a sort of rough-and-ready eloquence at his command, and the vehemence of his feeling lent double strength to all he said.

They had stopped walking as their talk went on, and were leaning over a gate, and Lance's head was bent down upon his hands. It was a moment of great temptation.

"You'll come back," said Austin, laying his hand heavily on his friend's shoulder.

"I cannot," answered Lance, in a half-stifled voice.

"And why not? Is this book, this tremendous history, worth all you are giving up for it?"

Lance started up. Suddenly there rushed upon him a vivid realization that his costly sacrifice had indeed been made in vain. The book! how lengthy, heavy, and unutterably dreary it appeared to him just then. He laughed a short, bitter laugh. "You should not cross-question one so, Austin."

"Are you not to count the cost, then?"

"What's the good? You think you have

shaken me, Hope; but you have not—not one bit. I don't know much about my father's book, but that is neither here nor there. I have made my choice, and I must abide by it. And now I think we had better be going home. I have listened patiently to all you had to say. Are you satisfied?"

"Yes, satisfied so far that I see you are not the man I used to believe in."

"You judge unfairly, Austin."

"On the contrary, I don't judge at all. Most likely you are right and I am wrong. Only we don't see things from the same point of view any longer, that's all."

"Circumstances have changed; not I."

"Circumstances! It's a convenient word. As if we were to leave our lives to be shaped by every outward thing that happens, and to drift along with the stream! We must bend our circumstances to us. I am an artist. I serve a stern mistress; she accepts no divided homage."

"You are right there," said Lance, looking up and speaking more clearly.

“And you mean to throw her over?”

“I must.”

“Then it’s all up. There’s nothing more to be said,” and Austin Hope lifted a bramble on his stick, and flung it angrily over the hedge.

“After all,” said Lance, wearied and ruffled, “there are other things in the world besides painting.”

Austin did not answer immediately. “Very well,” he said after a few minutes, “I give up. Other things? Of course there are; but when a man can say that, and feel it, as regards his individual self, he has ceased to be an artist. I am satisfied.”

“You know,” began Lance, and then stopped. What should he gain by saying more? Let it be. That which was crooked no words could make straight.

They walked back to the Old Bridge House in constrained silence, or else made attempts at commonplace talk that were almost more uncomfortable.

Ursula Ruthven was sitting on the little

terrace that overhung the river, with her work upon her knees, when the two young men returned. Lance, however, was in haste to be gone, and would not wait to see Nigel. Austin made no effort to keep him, and scarcely answered his old friend's promise to see him off next day.

"Don't trouble yourself," he said bluntly.

Lance turned, looked at him wistfully, and went away with a grave greeting to Ursula.

"So you are really going to leave us to-morrow," said Ursula, when she and Austin Hope were left alone.

"Yes," he answered absently, walking to the end of the little terrace as he spoke, and then returning. "Why yes ; I think it's time for me to go, seeing I have failed in all I came here hoping to do."

"Have you ?" asked Ursula, laying down her work and looking up at him.

"Thank you," he said, and he sat down on the low wall beside her.

"Why do you thank me ?" she asked, rather puzzled.

He made no answer directly.

"I have had a great disappointment since I came here," he said presently. "I have a good mind to tell you about it. I shouldn't, if you had gone on coolly working just now. Why did I thank you? Because you looked interested, you looked as if you really rather cared; so I think I should like to tell you about it. Shall I?"

"Yes," said Ursula.

"Not that there is much to tell, after all. I dare say I shan't be able to make you understand that it is any grievance; but, you see, I am a man of few friends, and I don't like losing those I have."

"No," said Ursula, as he paused; "naturally."

"Naturally, as you say. You saw Lance Gwynne just now. Well, I have always thought that man and I were as close friends as two men could well be, and I find we are not—that's all.

"By friendship, you understand, I mean sympathy in thought and opinion," he con-

tinued, coming back from another of his restless little turns along the terrace. "I don't say agreement, but sympathy; and I find that since we parted we have got miles asunder. I can't make it out."

"I don't think I quite understand," said Ursula.

"I said you wouldn't—no. And yet it's plain enough to my thinking. I shouldn't so much mind his having struck out a different line for himself—though, mind you, I hold that it is a far lower one—but I can't follow him in the tone he takes up. I can't see what has changed the man so utterly. He used to be as thorough-going an artist as you would wish to see, rather an enthusiast than otherwise, maybe, but as hard working as—I am myself; certainly the last man you would have expected to turn round and sneer at the whole thing, and yet he did to-day."

"It seems strange," said Ursula.

"Strange! I can't make it out, I tell you. They say this is a luxurious, shallow, money-

getting age, and so I suppose it is; but Lance Gwynne—how all force of purpose should have gone out of him in a few months, and left him half-hearted and listless, talking rubbish about prior claims and paramount duties. Duties! His duty was to work out his vocation; and it was a high one, if I am not mistaken. Not one of the best of them would have come near him. Can you fancy a man having the power and losing the will? I declare it's enough to make one believe in witchcraft. But I've done talking—small thanks one gets."

"You came here to try and persuade him to go back to painting?"

"I came because I thought I could save him. Why, I thought he would only need to hear again the sound of the old words that used to ring like trumpet-calls; but you might as well talk to the dead—the heart has gone out of him."

"I don't think he looks satisfied or happy; Nigel said——"

"What does Nigel know of such a man.

as Gwynne is, or used to be, rather," interrupted Austin. "Happy! No. Whoever thought he could be when he has turned against his own nature? Is it really for money, do you suppose? I say, Miss Ruthven, I wish you would watch him and see what you can make of him. I can do no more."

"I don't think I am likely to succeed where you have failed," said Ursula.

"Oh, I don't want you to succeed if you mean in getting him back to his work. Heaven forbid! I wouldn't have him back against his will for anything on earth. What good would he do with half a heart? But one can't leave off caring about the poor fellow all at once, and if ever you saw the old nature waking up again, you might let me know. Will you? As things are now, he and I have nothing left in common." Austin Hope scattered the ivy-leaves he had been stripping off the wall as he talked, down on to the stream below, and looked after them with an expression of perplexed

distress that made Ursula like him better than before, notwithstanding his bluntness.

After he left her, she sat on basking in the spring sunshine, and thinking about her brother's two friends—this rough, outspoken, down-right Austin Hope, and Lance Gwynne, who spoke so little, seemed so self-contained, and was supposed to be a recreant to his art.

Could it be, as Austin Hope had said, that the age was shallow, and that its sons squandered their strength on many lesser objects, instead of concentrating it on one?

Alas! that it was so with Nigel she secretly knew full well. Would it be a consolation, or the reverse, to know that there were others like him? Ah! if her brother had only been like Austin Hope—patient, concentrated, and enthusiastic, full of faith in himself and in the worth of the aim he had set before him, how proud she would have been of him; but—— And Ursula sighed.

Her brother's changeableness wearied

and saddened her. She was sorry he should have a friend who must be something like himself; and yet Lance Gwynne's face was surely a strange one to belong to a man of undecided character. She thought that if he came often to see Nigel, she would try to watch him, as Austin had asked her to do, and to find out for herself whether his old friend judged him justly or harshly.

Austin Hope left Marlixtowe the next morning. Lance met him at the station, and saw him off. Outwardly their friendship remained unaltered. Perhaps it was to both the more irksome, since each knew that the bond between them was already broken, and that when they met again it would be as comparative strangers.

As Lance looked after the train moving slowly out of the station, and then quickening its pace beyond, his thoughts went back to that evening, a year ago, when he had been the one to start, and Austin Hope had stood in the courtyard of the Post

Office at Rome, watching the diligence which bore his friend, all unconscious, away from the old life—the life to which Austin was now returning.

Well, all that was over long since. The first volume, generally the best part of a book, was closed for Lance. It was just as well that the last tie, Austin Hope's friendship, should be severed with the rest. He had long known that henceforth he must stand alone.

CHAPTER V.

THE summer had come, hot and balmy. It was the season of hay and roses, of midges, nightingales, and cricket.

“Not so good for sketching as it had been a month ago,” said Nigel, for the tender gaiety of the spring tints had ripened into the green monotony of summer. This was the excuse he made to Ursula for spending more than half the days of the week in playing cricket.

“Every one feels idle in hot weather, even Lance Gwynne,” he said, pointing to his friend; and certainly Lance, lying on the bank of the river, and watching the flowing water, did not look the picture of industry.

He had fallen into the way of spending many of his evenings with Nigel. The Old Bridge House in summer was rather a bewitching place—all flowery and bowery, with its masses of roses, and its mossy, wooded walks.

After a long hot day at his desk it was pleasant to come out in the sunset, on to the steep little terrace overhanging the river and the broken bridge, which gave the house its name.

Very different from the formal tea-table at home to which the seasons brought no variation, was the evening gathering on the terrace: Nigel and his father smoking, and Ursula knitting rapidly, with her eyes fixed on an open book that lay before her, on the low terrace wall.

It was very bright, Lance used to think, very summer-like, and easy-going. What was it that was wanting? Just something, to his feeling. If it had been the evening rest after a long day's work, it would have been perfect. But it chafed him to see

Nigel wasting time and opportunity so placidly. Sometimes the thought would force itself upon him that things were strangely allotted in this world, and though he submitted to the inevitable in silence, it was not in acquiescence.

After his usual thistle-down fashion, letting himself float where the wind wafted him, Nigel had fallen easily into the quiet routine of his father's house. He was by way of studying English scenery, which just at this moment he considered the only landscape in the world worth painting. So he sketched fitfully, and fished dreamily, and played cricket with all his heart and soul.

Even Lance was drawn in by his ardour. He had been a capital cricketer in his school days, which, after all, poor fellow, were not so very long ago. He now joined the Marlixtowe cricket club, and attended their practices once or twice to please Nigel, caring very little for the game himself. But Maxy took such a deep interest in his

play, and heard with such genuine pride of every lucky hit, that Lance, partly in order to have a good score to report at home, began to put more heart into the game. And so the love of cricket, lying dormant in most Englishmen, awoke again. By the time the eve of an important match arrived, Lance was nearly as keen as Nigel, and Maxy's excitement was beyond measure. No thought that he was debarred from even looking on at the grand struggle came to damp his enthusiasm. But Lance could not stand the sight of the little face sparkling with eagerness, and the thought of his long day of lonely waiting.

He took his measures quietly, after holding council with Jane, whose sanction was given oracularly in the words, 'Nothing venture, nothing have.' And on the eventful morning, Maxy, pale with excitement, and almost silent from surprise, found himself in a wheeled chair, settled for the day in a convenient corner of the cricket-ground.

Was there ever such a day as that one? Did the sun ever shine half so splendidly before, or the smooth ground look so green? Maxy, for one, thought not. With Lance in his cricketing dress on the grass beside him, and the level battle-field spread out in front, could life offer anything more?

Yes; that Lance should make a good score. But, 'tis not in mortals to command success,

Lance is only just in, and Maxy's heart is going like a steam-engine. It is almost the first ball. The bystanders (malicious people all) said Lance hit up; at all events, the ball went spinning high into the air—there was a rush, a clapping of hands. No, it could not really be “caught out.”

Suddenly the sun went out of the sky, the brightness faded from the trees and grass, the warm freshness from the air. Maxy saw his brother go over to the tent; saw him answer a few inquiries, receive a few condolences, and then he came across the field to join him. Maxy was all but

crying; only his pride for Lance, and the eyes on him, kept back the tears. People saw his eyes fill, and his lip quiver, and were sorry for him. Before Lance came the tears were got rid of somehow, but Maxy had rarely felt such pain as was tearing at his heart.

"The fortune of war, Maxy," was Lance's comment as he threw himself down on the grass beside him.

"Oh, Lance! how could the ball—how could it?" exclaimed Maxy huskily.

Lance laughed.

He looked provokingly unmoved, and yet for the moment he felt secretly as if this mischance was the straw that broke the camel's back. It brought, as trifles sometimes do, the sense of universal failure over him. Everything seemed against him; even this, in which he had tried to forget the sorrow of his life—even this only turned out one more disappointment.

"I am only fit for one thing," he thought, "and that is taken from me. How I hate

this cricket, and the country, and the whole thing! What a failure everything that I put my hand to is!"

Outwardly he only appeared intent on a book he had taken from his pocket. A cheer rang from the field—another. Lance looked up. His successor was winning laurels. It was almost more than Maxy could bear. Up came Arthur Deane, the captain of their side.

"That was an unlucky business of yours, Gwynne," he said; but he looked at Maxy, and the boy's face stopped him. "Never mind," he added, "Ruthven is getting up the score. Better luck next time," and he nodded good-naturedly to Maxy as he went on.

"Next innings——" began Maxy.

"Don't count on them," said Lance, without raising his eyes from his book. "It's half of it chance."

"But you mean to try," said Maxy in dismay.

"Of course. Only if the luck is dead against one!"

“Oh!” What a sigh that was!

Lance looked up, feeling suddenly ashamed of himself.

“Never mind, Maxy, we won't be beat if we can help it.”

The sun began to shine faintly again for Maxy. “Hallo! that was a good hit! Well done! I believe we're ahead now.”

“But you didn't make the runs.”

“What matter, so long as they are made? Come, cheer up, little Hopeful. Just look at Nigel Ruthven, though: I know he'll be run out.”

Nigel, with his quicksilver speed and rashness, was as likely to lose the match for his side as to win it. He was hardly safer as a friend than as a foe.

The day went on with varying fortunes, and the excitement rose higher. Things were looking gloomy, and the balance of success hung more than doubtful, when, late in the afternoon, Lance went in for the second time.

Almost his first hit brought a storm of clapping from the tent. Maxy's heart was

in his mouth ; but eye and hand were in now. Lance's play, steady and scientific, was such as good judges like to watch. After a few minutes he seemed to do just as he liked with the ball. The score went up rapidly. The rest of the time was to Maxy only one long thrill of triumph, that was so keen as to be almost pain. For once in his life his face was as red as a turkey-cock. His hands ached with clapping. Again and again, through all the cheering and the shouts, Lance could catch the little thin, "Bravo ! run it out, Lance," that in reality was nerving his arm.

Nigel, who, like many of the lookers-on, was touched and amused by the boy's breathless eagerness, stayed beside him till the victorious close. For—crowning triumph—Lance carried out his bat ; and when, a little time after, he went back to Maxy, he found him the centre of a crowd of perfect strangers, who were wishing him joy. As Lance saw him, scarlet and quivering, trying indignantly to get rid of a lump

in his throat that would not let him speak, and to behave as if the victory was a simple matter of course, he could not help feeling that for once the game had been well worth fighting for, and winning.

With very different eyes from Maxy's, did Ursula Ruthven look upon the noble game of cricket. To her it simply seemed a wonderful waste of Nigel's precious time. She had always been very ambitious for her brother, both for his own sake and his father's. But of late, especially since Austin Hope's visit, something sorrowful and full of regret had come into her thoughts of him. She began to weary of the dreams that never seemed to come any nearer their fulfilment, and dimly to dread for her father the future heart-sickness of hope deferred.

Sometimes she fancied that he blinded himself wilfully to Nigel's shortcomings. At all events, he fired up at the merest hint of doubt, and resented Ursula's coaxing attempts to keep her brother to his work.

"I'd rather you were not famous at all, Nigel, if you are not in the very first rank," she said to him one day.

"To be sure—'Victory or Westminster Abbey,' " he answered lazily.

"That doesn't apply the least," said Ursula, half laughing.

"Sounds well," returned Nigel, getting up to leave the room.

"May I come and watch you paint, Nigel?"

He laughed, shook his head, and departed. Ursula was disappointed, and as she looked up she met her father's eyes.

"You are always lecturing, Ursula. It is most unwise," he said impatiently. "No wonder you weary your brother."

"Do I weary him, father?" said Ursula, so brightly that it was impossible to resist her smile. "I am sorry, but you know Nigel is just a little bit lazy."

"Well, well—poor Ursie, I believe you mean well; but"—and Captain Ruthven shook his head—"you don't understand

young men. You must allow them some little amusement."

On this principle, Ursula was taken to the next cricket-match, played only a short distance from the Old Bridge House; and she sat under the shade of a big oak-tree, watched, wondered, and tried to understand. Too much of a foreigner to be able to make it all out, she thought it very odd, very pretty, and utterly mysterious.

There was the bright sweep of level sward, such turf as you only see in England—nay, there only, on rolled, watered, cherished cricket-grounds. Overhead a blaze of sunshine, and a glowing sky, that the few thin clouds only seemed to make more intensely blue. On one side of the field a tent with a lazily stirring flag, a water-cart, groups of people, gathered round a big roller, who now and then broke into shouts of approval and encouragement that made Ursula look more eagerly at the white-clad figures gathered round the wickets—some running so frantically, others standing apathetically still.

She can make out Nigel, leaning forward with his hands upon his knees, and Lance, standing quietly with folded arms. Arthur Deane, too—she has been told that he is bowling. She watches him throw the ball, hears the click of the bat, so pleasant to cricket-loving ears, and there goes Lance tearing down the hill like a racer, while a fresh burst of clapping sounds from the opposite tent. Nothing comes of it, as far as Ursula can see; the ball, which was flung up by Lance, is being tossed leisurely from one player to another. Her father's reminiscences of Indian cricket are rather hazy and only perplex her more.

The day goes on slowly. By-and-by Nigel and Lance come and sit on the grass and enlighten her ignorance. Lance has been playing well; but to him, too, the day seems rather long, and the match lacks the interest of the former one. He would have been surprised if he could have guessed Ursula's thoughts about him as they sat under the trees side by side. She mis-

trusted him. Austin Hope's words rankled, and she did not think Lance a good friend for her brother.

After the match was over, he and Ursula sauntered homewards along the river-side. Nigel remained behind to settle some business about a return match, and his sister and Lance walked on slowly, drinking in the coolness of the evening air that floated up from the river.

That river-side ! What more could you want of peaceful beauty ? There were no trees here, but the banks sloped up gently to a great corn-field, and there was a sense of space and lightness and fresh air. A cart-track ran along the water's edge just above the rushes, and on either side of it grew ox-eyed daisies, and scarlet poppies, and thistles. The polished water reflected here only the surface of the sky, and was darkened only by its clouds.

How different from the passionate river further up, with the gloom of trees and the eddy of rocks vexing its eager heart as it

rushed towards the sea—as different as was Ursula's quiet heart from Lance's pent-up pain.

They walked side by side, but they did not talk much. Neither as yet had found the key to the thoughts of the other.

Lance was scarcely thinking consciously at all. He was letting the sunset freshness and the cool air have their way with him, and they were comforting him. He was glad to be comforted, for his trouble was a real one—too real for him to nurse it. And this evening, causelessly and transiently, there had come to him a baseless vision of possible peace: some day he would be at one with himself, and not have to struggle any more; some day he would no longer feel ruffled and ill-used and injured, but the old feeling of good-will to all the world would have come back to him. How it would be, or when, he did not know; but for the moment life seemed bearable, and the future had gleams of brightness.

Ursula, for her part, was thinking of her

silent companion. She was pitying him for having fallen short of the high promise of his youth, and wondering how it could have come to pass that he should have changed so much. She doubted whether the day would ever come when she could fulfil the mission Austin Hope had left her. Lance was very unapproachable. It was easy enough to see that he was not happy, or, as Ursula expressed it in her thoughts, that the lower life he had chosen failed to satisfy him; and, with all her frank, friendly nature, she longed to be a help to him. But she was judging him on mistaken grounds, and her youthful severity was completely thrown away.

Lance dimly perceived that she disapproved of him. He wondered at the little set speeches she made him, and at the small moral lectures that were delivered with such an evident effort for his benefit. He saw how shyness and earnestness brought the colour to her cheeks. Once and again she raised her eyes to speak, and then bent suddenly instead to gather the poppies and

marsh-mallow beside the path. She had gathered a gaudy, quickly-fading nosegay of field-flowers as she walked, and Lance watched her, amused, as she absently added to it, poppies whose red petals dropped off as she lifted them, and dandelion clocks, the down of which floated away upon the evening air.

"I wish Nigel was not so fond of cricket," she said abruptly at last.

"It's a great game," answered Lance, his cricketing instinct making him stand on the defensive.

"Yes, I dare say. Of course it is. Only I should like him to be doing something else. It is a waste of time for him. An artist"—very emphatically, with a glance at her companion—"should not have time or thought for anything but his work."

"'All work and no play,' you know," quoted Lance smiling. "Are you not rather hard on artists?"

Ursula was shocked; her worst opinion of him was confirmed.

"If I were a painter," she said gravely, "I do not think I should want play. I think I could care for nothing but my work."

Lance did not answer. Perhaps he agreed with her too heartily. Perhaps he was surprised that his light words should have been taken so seriously.

"I cannot imagine Mr. Austin Hope playing at cricket," resumed Ursula, returning to the charge, after another silence and another raid upon the poor robin and the willow herb.

"Austin Hope! No more can I," answered Lance with a laugh; "but you have pitched on an exceptional man. If you knew more of artists, I am afraid you would find that there are not so very many like him."

"I am afraid not, indeed," said Ursula with meaning.

"Besides, I am sure Austin could not hit a ball to save his life," continued Lance, "whereas Nigel is a very fair player, considering how little practice he has had."

Clearly he would not make the matter a personal one.

"I wish you would not encourage Nigel to play," she said, returning to the thought that, after all, was nearest to her heart.

"I encourage him!" exclaimed Lance, and then stopped to consider. "Well, it is quite true that I have not tried to prevent him; but I agree with you, Miss Ruthven, that a real artist needs very little urging on to his work."

"You really think that?"

"Undoubtedly, I do."

"Then"—the question came out at last—"do forgive me for asking you: why did you give up——"

"Pardon me," interrupted Lance quickly. "We were talking of Nigel. I was not speaking of myself. I am not an artist."

The shadow, deeper than ever, had come down over his face. Ursula drew back, feeling almost as if she had received a blow. Her sympathy had been rejected, her little vision of giving help and counsel rudely dispelled.

Nigel's voice calling their names behind was a relief to both. Perhaps, though, it would have been better if he had stayed away a little longer. It is always a pity when two people go on playing at cross purposes; and Lance was not so angry or Ursula so hard-judging as they supposed each other to be. Lance would have been sorry if he could have guessed how she repented her impulsive question; and for her part it would have consoled her to know that he thought of it much less during his solitary walk home, than of how it could be that Nigel was not more hard-working with such a father and sister to spur him on to exertion.

"I dare say he will not come back any more," thought Ursula, "and I shall not have done a bit what Austin Hope wanted; besides, he must have thought me very rude."

So when, to her surprise, one or two evenings afterwards, Lance appeared as usual on the terrace, she met him with a deepening colour and an unspoken entreaty for

forgiveness in her eyes. Neither did Lance answer her in words, but he shook hands with a sudden sweet smile, so bright and frank that it entirely changed his face, showing him for a moment to Ursula as he used to be, and making her doubt for the first time whether Austin could have known the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

After all, their little misunderstanding and silent reconciliation made Lance and Ursula better friends, even while it served to increase Ursula's perplexity. She asked her brother about it one day, but he also had only heard the story from Austin.

"I see it worries Lance to be questioned," he said, "so I let him alone. I dare say he knows his own business best."

"Only one might help him; Austin Hope thought it possible."

Nigel shrugged his shoulders.

"*Laissez couler l'eau sous le pont,*" he said. "It is no use striving after the unattainable; and if Austin could not do anything with Lance, I don't suppose that you will."

"Do you think as much of his talent as Mr. Hope does?" asked Ursula.

"Yes, indeed, that I most certainly do. Talent? Why it's more than that. He has Genius! Yes, Genius with a big G, and no mistake!"

"Then it's all the more incomprehensible."

"Well, there's no doubt about the fact."

Nigel was the most generous of people in speaking of others. It was a pleasure to listen to praise that was so heartily and ungrudgingly given.

"Lance's drawing was simply magnificent," he went on—"full of power. I myself used to think his colouring a little cold. I don't know, though; there was a severe purity about it that was very impressive. Yes; that's the word. It was too harmonious to be called striking, but it impressed one."

"And he worked too?" asked Ursula.

Nigel gave a little side glance and shake of the head at his sister, as if he sus-

pected a covered hit at himself; but he answered, "Ah, he did work, just. 'Lotto,' as the Romans used to call him, became a sort of by-word for industry in the whole set. That was what made Hope so tender over him. Dear me, what a rage he was in when Lance went home and did not come back. He never told anybody that Lance had written to him, but he moped and cut up rough if we only mentioned his name. Poor old Austin! I suppose, after all, he has got something in him that Lance has not."

"Of course he has," said Ursula indignantly. "Genius and perseverance put together——"

"Oh, my dear, if you are going to point a moral——" And Nigel got up from the grass where he was lying under a cherry-tree.

"I am not," said Ursula musingly. "I was only thinking of your two friends."

"Austin is a bit of a hero of yours," said Nigel, pelting her softly with big ripe cherries.

"I don't think so," said Ursula, colouring and laughing. "He interests me because he is strong, and rough, and full of purpose. I think he would make rather a good character in a book."

Nigel shook his head, and puffed away meditatively at his pipe. People are very fond of saying, "So-and-so would make a good character in a book." But it is not so easy to paint a portrait fairly. A human character is a complex thing; the colours to be used must be various indeed, and very carefully mixed. And, after all, a picture shows you but one side. Of a written portrait, taken from life, with all the unexpected twists and turns of character inexorably put down, probably the first criticism would be, "What an inconsistent character! how unnatural!"

Some such thoughts as these were in Nigel's mind, but it was too much trouble to put them into words; he only laughed presently, and said, "Why, what on earth would you do with dear old Hope, if you got

him into a book, or with Lance Gwynne either, for that matter ? ”

“ No, I could not manage Lance Gwynne : I know too little of him, and my hero should never fail as he has done. Still, you think he would have made a great artist if he had gone on ? ”

“ Lance ? ”—with a yawn, for Nigel thought he had talked quite long enough on the subject—“ yes, as sure as you’re a French-woman——”

This was a certain diversion, for at this time of her life Ursula was intensely, unreasoningly English. England had long been her ideal, the sort of El Dorado that one sometimes sees it become to those whose youth has been spent abroad.

She had inherited little from her French mother, only the faintest and prettiest touch of a foreign accent when she was much in earnest, and a certain freshness and sunny quickness that made her what the French themselves call *facile à vivre*. But the solid block of her character was English.

This was a memorable summer to her in more ways than one. There was the delightful novelty of English country life, more still, perhaps, of English books. The old uncle from whom Mr. Ruthven inherited the Old Bridge House, had been something of a book-collector, and had left well-stored shelves behind him that opened out to Ursula unimagined realms of knowledge. Half the day she read, and all day long she thought. Such books as these unclosed for her the doors of a new world, that broke upon her with a flood of light.

But there was another dawning too—the breaking of a far grander and more lasting day, the first streaks of which were beginning to touch with dim broken light the horizon of Ursula's life.

She had made friends, in her simple cordial way, with many of the cottagers who lived near her new home. Among them she found an old woman, unlearned and quaint of speech, but possessing one of those rare souls whom God himself seems to

teach, and His lessons to her were all lessons of love and joy.

She talked to Ursula simply, and out of the very fulness of her heart, most unconscious that she was speaking a language strange as it was beautiful to the girl who listened to her so earnestly.

Poor child, the *bon Dieu* of her motherless childhood had long since faded into the cold distant memory of a half-learnt lesson. Now she heard of God once more; heard of Him as a living, loving Father, a very present Friend and source of joy.

Ursula kept her old friends' sayings, and pondered them in her heart; she heard, wondering, of homely words spoken to God in loving trust, of answers sent by Him that through faith had become realities, of tender patient longing to be with the "dear Lord," and to see Him whom unseen was yet so loved.

All this was very strange to Ursula. She stood wistful and awe-struck, with hesitating feet, on the threshold of a new life.

It may be that even then good seed was sown ; but new interests, and new cares and thoughts of many kinds were thronging round her. Something she learnt, much she let slip from her for lack of leisure, yet with a feeling that some day she must turn back to it. And she did so, later, but with bleeding feet and an aching heart, and ears that were strained to catch the far-off echoes of those words of peace.

CHAPTER VI.

"DON'T you think it is a very hot night?" said Mrs. Gwynne.

"I think it is," responded Lance.

"It is bright moonlight, isn't it?"

"I believe it is."

Five minutes pause.

"I suppose it is getting late."

"I suppose it is," answered Lance, without looking up from his book.

He and his mother were spending the evening alone together. Mr. Gwynne, for a wonder, was at Oxford, on a special mission of research in the Bodleian Library, and in default of all her usual occupations Mrs. Gwynne felt a singular and unwonted inclination to be sociable. But Lance was totally

unconscious of her good intentions. That his mother should want to "have a chat" with him, after the fashion of other mothers, was a thing entirely out of the range of his experience.

He went on reading, perseveringly, while Mrs. Gwynne sat at work on the opposite side of the table. Every now and then, as she laid down her scissors, or threaded her needle afresh, she looked across at her son, and wished he would shut his book and talk to her. She would have begun herself if she could have thought of anything interesting to say; but it was not easy, and while she was considering, the time slipped on. The three remarks she did hazard—not very brilliant ones certainly—Lance allowed to fall very flat. "As you bake," Jane would have told her, "so you will brew." Yet Mrs. Gwynne felt aggrieved.

They were both aroused at last by the sound of quick-coming carriage wheels, and horses' hoofs galloping furiously past the house. Lance reached the window, and

drew aside the blind just in time to see the fire-engine dash past and vanish like a flash of lightning down the road. A crowd of people were following it on foot, running at full speed in the same direction.

"Where's the fire?" shouted Lance, throwing up the window.

A dozen voices answered that Mr. Deane's stables were burning, and that the house itself had just caught fire, when the engines were sent for.

Mr. Deane was the senior partner of the Marlixtowe Bank.

Lance was at the hall door in a moment.

"Lance," called his mother, following him with a candle, "where are you going?"

"Only down there. I shan't be long. Don't let any one sit up for me. Good-night, mother."

The quiet tone contrasted with the eager way in which he vaulted over the gate, and disappeared down the road after the others. Mrs. Gwynne went back into the empty sitting-room and sighed—she scarcely knew

why: perhaps because there was a long-lost look of animation on Lance's face when the candle-light fell upon it—perhaps because she felt that he did not care to have her sympathy in his errand—"Ah, well."

She sat down and finished her work, then closed her basket and put the room in order for the night. It was tidy enough already, almost painfully so; for the books were straightened and the papers folded away with the unused look that so soon tells of an absent master.

The church clock near at hand solemnly tolled eleven, and was echoed by fainter chimes from a distance. There was really nothing to sit up for, but Mrs. Gwynne said to herself that she scarcely liked to go to bed as usual, when Mr. Deane's house was on fire, and Lance was absent. She went to the window and looked out again. Everything was quiet enough now. The white moonlight shone upon the road, and the trees cast black shadows across it. No one

was coming or going. Perhaps the fire was out. Then she remembered that the rooms on the other side looked over the fields towards Mr. Deane's house, and there, also, a footpath led to it from Marlixtowe.

She went up into her own room. Yes, from there she could see flames flashing and blazing through the trees. There was the pall of overhanging smoke, and the lurid light in the sky. A distant shout—another, and the confused hum of many voices faintly reached her.

Maxy's door was half open, and he called her doubtfully, as she passed his room. He was sitting up in bed, shivering.

"Why are you not asleep, Maxy?" she asked, going up to his bedside.

"Oh, I can't sleep. Lance is gone to the fire, isn't he?"

"Yes; he will be back presently. Who told you there was a fire?"

"Jane. They can see it splendidly from the attics; and look there"—as a shot of brighter flame lighted the room for a

minute, and the shadows of the trees flickered against the window.

Mrs. Gwynne drew down the blind. "There, Maxy, lie down and go to sleep. Don't look at the window, for the light will keep you awake."

"Oh dear, I wish Lance would come home," said Maxy, with a sigh. "What a long time he has been gone!"

"He will soon be home, I dare say."

"Not till the fire is quite, quite put out," said Maxy proudly; "but he has been gone a great while."

The words echoed in Mrs. Gwynne's ears uneasily as she went downstairs. It was a long time. Somehow Maxy's restlessness had infected her. The front door was open, and Jane stood looking out, but Mrs. Gwynne went on into the study without speaking to her, and the church clocks struck twelve.

She had decided now that she would prefer sitting up for Lance, and hearing how it had fared with Mr. Deane and his family.

The road still lay white and silent, and the moon shone brilliantly. Mrs. Gwynne stood at the window, and knew that Jane was watching at the door, and that behind the house were roaring flames, and a shouting crowd, and Lance.

Footsteps at last along the road—distant, nearer, close at hand: the measured tramp of several men. They came on quickly, and, as they cleared the shadow of the trees, she could see that they carried something dark upon their shoulders. The moonlight showed her the outline of a man's figure lying on a shutter, very still, with his face covered.

For a moment her heart stopped beating, but went on again as the men moved past without pausing, keeping their even step.

Jane had run down to the garden gate, and was speaking to some stragglers who were following. Mrs. Gwynne called to her as she turned back.

“It's a poor man, ma'am, that was hurt when the roof fell in. They are taking him

to the hospital. The stables are all burnt down, and the house is blazing now, they say, and Mr. Lance is in the thick of it."

"Mr. Lance is in the thick of it! I wish Lance would come home"—sentences that Mrs. Gwynne tried in vain to keep from running in her head, and which made her very uncomfortable.

She wished the boy was safe at home. She wished he had not heard of the fire. Finally, with a chill shadow of remorse creeping over her, she wished he had never come back from Italy. She should be almost glad just now to know he was at Rome. If anything were to happen to him, poor Lance! And certainly of late he had not been happy. Perhaps she ought never to have sent for him. He had been so full of hope and contentment in his artist-life. If it proved to be the last months of his life that had been clouded and saddened!

Mrs. Gwynne did not deliberately think all this, but one fancy after another glanced across her mind, as she leant out

of the window which she had thrown wide open now. The moon was higher and the shadows shorter. Surely Lance ought to have been home by this time. He never stayed out late. He had been a good son since he came home, and his mother thought of his grave, patient face and quiet manner.

“I wish I had never sent for him; and yet it was quite necessary.” She looked back into the room, and at the drawers, where the piles of untidy manuscript that were to compass her husband’s greatness lay carefully hoarded. It did not seem worth the trouble to-night. Such sacrifices, and for what?—an uncertainty. Had it all been a mistake? In that silent room, with the moonbeams streaming in, the realities of Mrs. Gwynne’s life seem to have become shadowy and unsubstantial. If the great work should fail!—nay, if its success should be purchased at too great a price. For earth’s possessions must needs be insecure. Things, perhaps, as precious as her own, were this very night being destroyed by

fire. Mrs. Gwynne shivered from head to foot. Was it from some dim, strange foreshadowing of a still distant future? Who shall say? Her head sunk upon her hands. Fire! the very word was terrible to her. Oh, if Lance would come back from the thick of the fire!" And then, even as she thought this, she heard his voice speaking quietly in the hall to Jane.

"Yes, the fire is out at last. No lives lost."

"Oh, Lance!" she cried. "Oh, Lance!"

He came towards her, a black, begrimed figure, scorched and drenched from head to foot.

"You up still, mother? It must be very late. Were you anxious about the fire? Everybody is safe, and the fire has not spread beyond one wing."

"My dear Lance, I am so thankful to see you safe. Are you sure you are not hurt?"

"Not the least, thank you; only rather beat. No; I am not fit to kiss you," he added, drawing back and laughing: "I am

as black as a chimney-sweep. Good-night, mother."

That was all. After her long hours of intense watching and suspense, those few cold, cheery words, and that undemonstrative "good-night."

She followed him upstairs, chilled and weary. He had not gone to his own room. She heard him stop at Maxy's door, and an eager call to him from within.

Mrs. Gwynne looked into the dark room. She could just distinguish Lance sitting on the bed, and Maxy clinging to him, both arms clasped round his brother. They were laughing, though Maxy's laugh was rather tremulous.

"Oh, I am so glad!"

"You little muff, to go and get frightened. How came you to know anything about it? I told Jane not to tell you."

"I am sure you saved everybody's life. Are you much hurt, Lance?"

"No; only a little bruised and scorched, really. I shall be all right to-morrow."

"And you did save some of the people from being burnt?"

"Not I, indeed, Maxy. They were all out of the house before I got there, except—well, for your comfort, I believe there was one deaf old housemaid who might have been burnt in her bed if I hadn't fished her out."

"Tell me all about it."

"Not to-night. I am too tired, and so are you. Good-night, little Hopeful. Go to sleep." And then for a few minutes, as Lance bent lower down, their mother could not hear what they said to each other.

She went to Lance's room presently, to see if he wanted anything, and there she found grim old Jane tenderly putting cold bandages on his scorched hand and arm.

"Why didn't you call me?" asked Mrs. Gwynne, rather offended.

Lance looked up surprised. "Jane is doing it very comfortably, thank you."

Mrs. Gwynne retreated crestfallen. Neither of her sons seemed to want her,

for Maxy had fallen fast asleep ; and when his mother bent over him with a candle, to see if the excitement of the night had done him harm, he did not even move. Mrs. Gwynne saw some very black streaks on his cheek and forehead, rather as if a chimney-sweep had touched him. It was very odd that those black marks should give her an unaccustomed feeling of loneliness, and she sighed once or twice before she fell asleep thinking of them, and of Maxy's peaceful face.

The next day Marlixtowe was ringing with the story of the fire ; and it turned out that Lance had been the hero of the night. Maxy lay with burning cheeks and beaming eyes, as one visitor after another came in to tell the tale. Godfrey Deane, Mr. Gwynne's old pupil, came himself at last. Maxy sat absolutely upright to hear Lance's praises sung with such good-will.

"I knew he couldn't play cricket so well for nothing," ended Godfrey Deane, laughing. "But I fear he got a good deal scorched."

"I believe he was not much hurt," answered Mrs. Gwynne rather coldly, remembering her rejected help last night.

"Well, we're immensely obliged to him. You heard how he rushed back when everybody was out of the house to bring out the Rembrandt in the library. We all thought he would never get back safely, for the floors were giving way; but out he came, picture and all."

"He did not mention it," said Mrs. Gwynne.

"I tell him he thought the Rembrandt worth more than the human beings," said Mr. Deane, with another laugh.

But Mrs. Gwynne would not respond. "I am glad he was able to be of use," she said stiffly.

Godfrey Deane thought Lance's mother very disagreeable, so he grew less enthusiastic, repeated his acknowledgments more formally, and went away.

"Oh, Lance! why didn't you tell us about the picture," asked Maxy at dinner.

Lance coloured, and muttered something about there being nothing to tell.

"How did you know it was there?"

"I have seen it once or twice when I went to speak to Mr. Deane."

"What was it a picture of?"

"An old man, with a beard and a brown coat," answered Lance, rather impatiently.

"Was it a good picture?" persisted Maxy.

"Very. Mother, when do you expect my father home?"

He came that afternoon, came with a great accession of raw material for his book, with extracts to be copied, and papers to be set in order. Mrs. Gwynne was hard at work directly. The fire, Lance's gallantry, her evening of suspense, her visitings of compunction and remorse—all were forgotten, 'like the remembrance of a guest that tarried but a night.' She was in her true element once more. If a warning had been vouchsafed to her in the silent hours, she had let it pass by her unheeded.

It was a good thing that Maxy had made the most of his morning, for no one was admitted in the afternoon. He lay alone in the sitting-room, and heard the door-bell ring several times; but Jane always reported Mrs. Gwynne to be engaged, and Maxy was fain to content himself by listening to the retreating footsteps of Lance's admirers.

Lance himself "ran rusty," as Maxy expressed it, on his return home, and would stand no more questioning.

"What made you go on so about that picture before mother," he said.

"But did you really care enough for it to risk being burnt to save it?"

"No, no; at all events I didn't want my mother to think so."

"Well," said Maxy candidly, "I suppose I was rather a duffer to talk about it before her."

There was probably no house in Marlix-towe where the fire was discussed so little as at Mr. Gwynne's. Lance refused to be made a hero, and his mother, for some

reason she could not define, disliked having the thing talked about. Mr. Gwynne would scarcely have heard of it at all, if it had not been for Jane's pride in Mr. Lance's feats, and her indignation at the small fuss that was made over him at home.

"His father shall hear of it before I am a day older," she said to Maxy, "when young Mr. Deane called himself and all, and stopped on the doorstep to tell me Mr. Lance was a brick. Not that that was proper language, Master Maxy, and I shouldn't wish you to see much of Mr. Godfrey Deane, for 'evil communications corrupt good manners.' Still I knew him when he was a school-boy, and I believe he meant well."

"But so Lance is, no end of a brick," said Maxy.

"That he may be, Master Maxy, and the master ought to know it, if it is so: 'A wise son maketh a glad father.'"

"I don't think father ever is glad," said Maxy doubtfully; "he hasn't time."

“ ‘It’s a poor heart that never rejoices,’ ” responded Jane.

“ Besides, I don’t believe mother ever told him,” continued Maxy; “and Lance gave me a great poke when I wanted to begin.”

“ To be sure he did,” said Jane; “and so he ought. You would not have had him proud, and boasting of what he had done. Mr. Lance knows better. ‘Pride goes before a fall.’ ”

“ What a bother you are, old Jane,” said Maxy. “ But here’s a fine chance for you. Mother has just gone out, and father is alone in the study. Just you go in and tell him all about it.”

“ Well, Master Maxy, so I will, for ’tis my nature to. He ought to be told, and there’s no time like the present.”

“ ‘While the cat is away,’ et cetera,” suggested Maxy slyly.

“ I am surprised at you, Master Maxy,” said Jane, walking off into the study, and plunging straightway into her story, to Mr. Gwynne’s blank astonishment.

It would have been a funny scene if somehow there had not been something rather sad about it. The surprised author sat holding his pen arrested between the inkstand and the paper, gazing helplessly at Jane, with knit brows, and an indescribable expression of injured perplexity on his face.

What was all this ? It was really too bad. His half-written sentence was slipping from his memory, a large angry-looking blot had splashed down on to his fair manuscript, and here was Jane wasting his precious morning with some cock-and-bull story about a fire, and a deaf housemaid, and a picture by Rembrandt. He could not make it out at all, or what it was that she was driving at with her short dry sentences. She seemed very indignant about something ; but whether she wanted him to blame Lance for being rash and spoiling his clothes, or himself for not appreciating his son's gallantry, he really could not pretend to guess.

“ Why do you come to me ? What's all this about ? I know nothing of it. No one

has told me," said the man who never had time to be glad.

"That's where it is," said Jane.

"And I'm sure I don't know, for the life of me, what you want me to do now," he continued nervously, pushing his spectacles into his hair, and his hair to the very back of his head. "The fire is out, isn't it?"

"Won't you say a word to Mr. Lance, sir?"

"A word to Mr. Lance! Who? I? You'd better speak to Mrs. Gwynne about it. She'll say all that's necessary and proper, I am sure." And Mr. Gwynne looked relieved, and dipped his pen afresh into the ink.

"A word from you would go farther with Mr. Lance," said Jane, nothing daunted.

"Ah! indeed. I'm sure I can't see why. Well, yes, anything in reason. I'll speak, of course, some time or other; but really coming in like this when I was busy——"

(This would have brought Mrs. Gwynne to his feet at once, but it made no sort of

impression on Jane. Mr. Gwynne saw it, and felt more hardly used than ever.)

“Of course my work is of no sort of importance. I am quite aware of that, and don't expect it to be considered; everything is to be put on me, but, upon my word, Jane, this is rather strange conduct of yours. Perhaps you'll tell me what you want me to say?”

“‘Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh,’” grimly quoted Jane.

“Quite so, yes. Well, I've told you I mean to speak. If only one had some idea— Saved somebody's life, did he? and got scorched?”

“Came home looking just like a used-up Guy Fawkes, Mr. Gwynne, enough to make any father proud. Not but what I call it a tempting of Providence, and a waste of good clothes; but there's no use crying over spilt milk, and Mr. Lance will never put on that coat of his again.”

“It's very gratifying, of course,” said Mr. Gwynne, rubbing his forehead as if to

collect his thoughts. "I am glad he did his duty."

"Just so, sir; and any few words it might be your pleasure to speak," continued Jane, dusting the table with her apron, and suddenly lapsing into demureness, "I am sure Mr. Lance would take them kind."

"Oh, he would, would he? Ah, I dare say. Better speak at once, perhaps, and get it over, if it is to be done, and then may be (soliloquising) I shall get rid of old Jane. Lance!" he called, as he saw his son pass the window, and heard his step the next moment in the hall; "just come in here a minute, will you?"

Lance obeyed.

"Lance," began Mr. Gwynne, very nervous and flurried, "I have only just been made acquainted with the circumstances of the late fire, and I learn with pleasure that you displayed great presence of mind in a very trying position. I heartily congratulate you. I am given to understand that you behaved with considerable coolness and

propriety, and that your conduct was such as to attract the favourable notice of your employer."

Here Jane was overcome by her feelings, and hastily withdrew to tell Maxy that the master was talking like a book to Mr. Lance. It was beautiful to hear him.

"Mr. Deane, I hear, speaks of you in the handsomest terms. In short," continued Mr. Gwynne, for Lance was really too much taken aback by these compliments to speak—"in short—" He hesitated, and then relapsed into his long-disused school-master's formula. "It is a satisfaction to me to add my testimony to his, and to mark my appreciation of your merit. It is both very gratifying to me personally, and calculated to reflect honour on us as a—family. I shall have great pleasure in—in—remembering it. Shake hands, my boy."

"My dear father,"—and Lance tried vainly to look grave, as he grasped his father's hand across the table—"it's very

kind of you, but I do assure you that it is all a mistake. I have done nothing in the smallest degree praiseworthy, except in old Jane's heated imagination."

"Three cheers for Lance — hooray!" sounded from the parlour in Maxy's treble voice.

Lance burst out laughing.

"Well, well, well," said Mr. Gwynne, joining for a moment in his son's laugh, and then growing very grave again, "never mind. I dare say old Jane is in the right. You must forgive me, Lance, if I seem to take little heed of your doings. I only live in these"—pointing to his books. "I seem to hear and know nothing of the world outside them," he added rather regretfully.

"I know how hard you work, father," said Lance, leaning on the back of a chair, and looking at Mr. Gwynne's care-worn face.

He always felt more sympathy with his dreamy, hard-working father than with his mother. Sometimes he fancied that they

might have had many things in common, if he had been less reserved himself, and his father less absent and absorbed.

"Aye," said Mr. Gwynne slowly; "aye, I work hard enough; but the question is with what result. There comes at times a weariness and a shadow over it all; a sense of want of progress, as if at each upward step the ground gave way beneath your feet, and you strove in vain to gain a higher footing. Did you ever have such feelings when you were painting, Lance?"

It was the first allusion his father had ever made in his hearing to the profession he had relinquished, and it might have struck Lance as strange, but that he was not thinking of himself just then.

"I have known the feeling," he answered. "So, I think, must all true artists—artists of all sorts, I mean; but it does not stay."

"Ah, it does not stay—it does not stay; you say that. There is the difference between the young and the old. I tell you the time comes when it does stay. I fear

it, Lance; I fear it." And he raised his eyes, full of a strange shadow of dread, to his son's face.

"Father," said Lance earnestly, "you should give yourself more rest."

"Rest!" he echoed bitterly, "rest! with so much of my work still to be done. No, indeed; rather tell me to work harder. Don't talk to me about rest. What do you know of work like mine? Why, I ought to be at it now. Go, Lance, go!" he added with sudden impatience, drawing his papers towards him. "Don't keep me dawdling any longer. I have wasted half the day already."

Lance went away disappointed. It had been only a momentary admission into his father's confidence, but it interested him, and he would fain have given sympathy, if nothing else. But when he looked back before closing the door, Owen Gwynne had fallen back into his familiar attitude of abstraction; already his pen was in his hand. And when they met again, neither

word nor sign showed any remembrance of the words he had spoken.

Lance wished he could have forgotten as easily, but an old chord had been set jarring by his father's question, "Did you have such feelings when you were painting?" and for a long time it would not grow still again. Yes, he remembered only too well. There used to be hard moments of discouragement, no doubt, but oh, the joyous flood of hope and conscious power that used to rush back and blot them out!

Once more Lance betook himself for consolation to the congenial atmosphere of the Old Bridge House. There was no one just now to miss him at home, for as the summer heat grew greater Maxy began to droop, and his old doctor ordered him off to the sea-side. That was a white page in the boy's history. He used to lie for hours together on a rug below high-water mark, hoping that Jane would forget him till the waves washed over him, and eagerly watching the glassy tide that swept up lazily and

left a curved silver fringe of foam ever nearer to his feet.

Lance spent a long merry day with him on the rocks, dabbling in sea-water pools, and seeing white ships sail by, and sea-gulls float, and boys with shrimping nets go wading out into shallow water when the tide was low.

He left Maxy the centre of a crowd of young fishermen, who were digging rivers and building fortifications under his directions, and seeing him so happy he did not grudge the dreary silence of the sitting-room at home.

The woods round the Old Bridge House were dark and fragrant, and the river was beautiful. There was a great charm about the place. Nigel had got hold of an old heavy boat, and he and Ursula nearly lived on the water during those hot days.

To Lance the river, in its summer loveliness, came to be more than a living friend. It satisfied in some way the craving after beauty that, stifle it as he

would, it was out of his power to destroy. There was the water gliding on, with a silver ripple here, a glint of sunlight there. Clear brown depths under the banks, into which the trees were reflected in shadows clouded and broken: stones round which the stream eddied and broke into living crystals. On it went into the gloom of leafy greenery, where the water darkened and gathered intensity of colour, where reeds waved and dimpled the glittering surface as they stirred. Here lay the round leaves of white lilies, golden-hearted and set in sun-gleams. The boat passed through them with a soft crushing sound—out again into the level sunbeams that, shot from the burning west, lay like dazzling arrows all across the stream.

And so they sometimes went far up the river, in and out through the shine and the shadow, past the steep banks and the heavy summer woods and the green meadows, until the light failed and the sky grew purple with the coming night.

Lance and Nigel divided the labour of rowing between them, as best pleased them both. It suited Lance to pull steadily and vigorously up stream through the glow of evening sunshine, while Nigel lay full length at the bottom of the boat with his straw hat drawn over his eyes. Often the brother and sister talked and Lance listened. Idle, bright talk it was, yet generally characteristic. Day by day their natures were shadowed forth to him more clearly; day by day the unstable fitfulness of the one grated against the earnestness of the other. Ursula could not always play with things; and by degrees, as her eyes were turned away in ever-renewed impatience and disappointment from her brother, they learned unconsciously to look for the quick silent sympathy in Lance's face.

Sometimes the mood was on Nigel to draw. Then the boat was left to float in some lovely dreamy river nook, and Lance, leaning his elbow on the side, and his chin upon his hand, would wait the sketcher's pleasure.

Nigel was fond of talking as he drew ; going into rhapsodies over every tint and curve, with a sort of surface enthusiasm that would have made a stranger wonder why he ever stopped drawing at all.

It was on one of these evenings that Ursula was struck, as if for the first time, by the look of stern melancholy on Lance's downcast face. He was gazing into the water, absently watching the gold and silver ripples that bubbled up and broke on the stream. He took no heed of Nigel's flow of art jargon. He let the sunset burn itself away in glory without giving it a glance. His attitude was simply one of patient waiting ; and yet, once seen, Ursula could not close her eyes to the resolute endurance of suffering that was expressed in his set features.

She began from that time to be sorry for him, and look upon him with another kind of feeling. Those two—Lance and Ursula—would have wondered if they had known how oddly their thoughts sometimes met and crossed each other.

Lance thought often of an old sentence of hers, laughingly and carelessly uttered, and yet spoken as if she meant it. "All my sympathy," she had once told Austin Hope—"all my sympathy is with success." It was nearly the first thing he had ever heard her say, and he had not forgotten it. Could it be possible that this girl with her sweet, earnest, haunting face was ambitious, like his mother? Surely not. No woman ought to be ambitious. It only brought misery and unrest, both to themselves and others. Nigel now, poor fellow, with all his fine talk and his utter want of power to persevere—it was not his fault, perhaps, he could not help it—but he would just break his sister's heart if it was set on his success. Oh, to have the chance of winning triumphs just that he might lay them at her feet! And he could—he knew he could. Stop: what was he thinking of? No. He was chained, powerless, bound hand and foot. No struggle, no victory, no success, such as she loved, for him; and

her own words stood as a barrier between them."

And Ursula, watching his bowed head and firmly closed lips, was thinking, "Can this really be the half-hearted, fickle artist that Austin Hope railed against and renounced. He ought to know best, and yet— I wish he could be comforted. I am sure of one thing—if he gave up painting, he is bitterly sorry now. He thinks it is too late, poor fellow. Could nothing be done to help him? I am sure he cannot like to see Nigel draw, and tear up his sketches half finished, and go on talking as he does."

"Even now," thought Lance again, "Nigel is wearying and disappointing her. I can see it. And yet even Nigel clings to the name; he calls himself an artist, and I——"

Well, it must be borne. Long ago she had judged him, and condemned him. She thought of him just as Austin Hope had done; only, if she knew all as Austin knew

it, would she not be less hard than he had been? might she not have some pity, some kind thought for him?

"You wouldn't make half a bad picture yourselves, you two," said Nigel from the bank, waking them both out of their musings. "I saw lots like it in the Academy this year. The clumsy old tub of a boat, and Lance crumpled up over his oar, and you, Ursie, with your broad hat and 'yellowy sort of gown, and the wet water-lilies across your knee. Such a background, too; red-brown tree stems, and blue haze, and a lacework of leaf shadows on the water——"

"Oh, Nigel, don't!"

"Don't what, my dear? Spare your blushes: I'm not thinking of you so much as of the queer effect of light behind you, and of the slanting sunbeam shafts thrown back from the polished water, and of the jolly tone of that red earth on the bank. Just look, Lance."

"Please, Nigel," she said, "let us enjoy

it our own way. Don't pull it to pieces this evening. Somehow it breaks the charm."

"Does it? I should be sorry to interfere with your pleasure; but I haven't the remotest notion what you mean."

"Why, one gets tired of hearing about 'effects,' and 'tone,' and 'balance,' and all the rest of it. You talk as if it was only a fine picture."

"Well, isn't it a fine picture? I was merely presuming to speak as a painter."

"You are not always so artistic," said his sister, half vexed and half laughing. "Suppose you forget your paintership for this evening."

"Consistent!" said Nigel, raising his eyebrows good-humouredly. "What would Austin Hope say to you?"

"I am sure you know what I mean," continued Ursula, turning to Lance. "Such an evening as this is something more than a good 'subject.'"

"Lance can talk shop enough when he

pleases," said Nigel, looking at his sketch with his head on one side; "but it isn't fair to appeal to him now."

"Oh, don't, Nigel!" exclaimed Ursula, colouring deeply.

Lance looked at her surprised, and then fell into a fit of wondering as to what could have made the colour come so hotly into her cheeks just then. What could Austin Hope have said to her about him? How much did she know of his affairs?

"Miss Ruthven," he said, when they had landed, and were walking slowly up towards the house, "when Austin Hope was here, did he talk to you about me?"

"Yes, a little," said Ursula frankly.

"Would you mind—may I ask you what he said?"

Ursula coloured and hesitated.

"Ah, I see!"—Lance spoke very sadly, and more to himself than to her—"I understand; but he might have left just that alone."

"I think," said Ursula, with a brave

effort, "he cared very much about you, so he was sorry, and puzzled."

"And you?" asked Lance, as she paused, "what did you think?"

"I did not quite understand," she said, looking up at him for a moment.

He did not answer directly.

"I should like you to understand," he said presently. "May I tell you my own story one day—will you mind listening?—and then you will judge for yourself?" And Lance turned to her with that rare sunbeam smile of his that she had seen once before.

She was not quite sure what she answered. She believed she said, "Yes." When he was gone she hoped she had, for she thought she should like to hear his story very much.

CHAPTER VII.

It was not often that Ursula and Lance were left alone; Nigel was generally with them, so that some time passed before Lance had any opportunity of telling her what he called his "story." Besides, it was always hard to him to begin speaking of himself.

But he was with the Ruthvens more constantly than ever. He had surrendered himself without questioning to the spell the place threw over him; he knew that the ice of apathy was fast melting from his heart, and that all the world was changing for him.

Ursula, on her side, went on as before, reading the dry old folios she found in her

uncle's book-room, but she wondered why they had grown so dull lately, and so difficult to fix her thoughts upon. Just now, also, another subject of deep interest had arisen for her, and for her father. Nigel was going to paint a picture.

The river sketches had borne fruit at last, and he could talk and think of little else. The dust gathered over his violin case. Cricket was a thing of the past, a mere stop-gap, a good game enough for people who had nothing to do.

A man could have but one real pursuit, said Nigel. It was all very well to talk of varied talents—stuff and nonsense. Michael Angelo wrote poetry, and Salvator Rosa composed music, did they? So they might. There were giants on the earth in those days. All the same his father would find that they let it interfere little enough with their art. At all events he only spoke for himself, and he could not afford to trifle or to lose his time.

To all of which Captain Ruthven, who

had only adventured the mighty names by way of argument, assented fervently, and rejoiced with trembling.

Ursula, too, trembled, but she scarcely ventured to rejoice yet. She had seen her father disappointed before this, and the flame of Nigel's zeal blazed up too fiercely for her not to dread its burning itself out before the end was reached.

The name of the picture was already chosen — "Before the Gloaming." The scene was a little way from the river-side, and the time, of course, sunset, on an evening in harvest time.

Lance and Ursula rowed Nigel down late one afternoon, and landed him at his sketching place, while they waited for him in the boat.

It was a picked evening, chosen for the especial loveliness of its lights and shadows. The boat lay, like Moses' ark, ensconced in bulrushes. Close by, a little brook came hurrying down "to join the brimming river," ending its merry race of inde-

pendence with a little rush and tumble that it would be grandiloquent to call a waterfall. But it made a pleasant splash and gurgle of its own, nevertheless. Some red cows stood placidly mooing in the cool water, and swallows dipped and skimmed above it.

Neither Lance nor Ursula spoke for some time after the sound of Nigel's whistle had gone out of hearing. Ursula looked down at her own zigzagging reflection in the flowing water, and Lance leant over his oar and watched her. It was the consciousness of this that made her rouse herself presently, and begin to talk. Something she said about the little waterfall caused them to talk of waterfalls in general, then of fountains, and finally of the great Trevi fountain at Rome.

"Did you drink some of the water before you came away?" she asked.

"I? No."

"Then do you never mean to go back to Rome?"

“Never,” answered Lance emphatically; “at least,” he added, in a lower voice, “I hope I never shall.”

“Yet you must have liked Rome?”

He gave a short laugh, as if the question was an odd one, and a sudden stroke of the oars sent the boat crushing in farther amongst the rushes. “Yes, I liked it well enough, but——” He stopped, and shifted his oars deliberately. “But I have no business there now.”

“No business?” repeated Ursula, feeling that they were touching on the debateable ground, and half fearing, half hoping that he would go on.

“No; you shall hear all about it if you will—you know you promised me to listen—and then, perhaps, you will be able to tell me if I have done right or wrong; for sometimes, since Austin Hope came here, I am haunted by the idea that I have acted like a fool. That’s the worst of all, supposing it has all been given up for a mistake.”

He was silent for so long after saying this, that Ursula began to wonder whether he would go on at all. Then he spoke again, abruptly. Lance did not tell the first part of his story at all well. He began nearly at the end, took it for granted that Ursula knew much more than she really did, and confused her by mixing up his recollections of his life at Rome, and first acquaintance with Austin Hope, with a yet earlier time, of boyish hopes and dreams in his father's school at Stone Cross. But when he came to speak of his summons home, and of the great trouble and sorrow of his life, his manner changed. Every word was telling, and carried with it a certain manly, simple pathos in its rigid truth and utter absence of exaggeration. In speaking to Ursula he could not overrate his struggle, neither could he pass it over lightly. He must speak of things as they were. It was to him as if he were pleading with her to judge kindly of his past acts. Austin Hope's opinion was nothing to him now

in comparison with hers. Each word and deed was brought up to the tribunal of her decision. To Mr. and Mrs. Gwynne's side of the question he gave full weight. Nay, in pleading their cause, was he not pleading his own, since their need of him was his greatest justification?

In all he said, far from claiming any merit for self-sacrifice, he only strove to make Ursula understand that it was not lightly he had resigned his vocation, and wasted the purpose of his life. Well, he went on to say, the choice, rightly or wrongly, had been made; and until Austin's coming, life had been heavy enough, certainly, but at least simple, in that it was vexed by no self-questionings and doubts. How dreary it was, his picturing, unconsciously strong in its quietness, brought vividly before Ursula—the dull drudgery of his daily work; his narrow cheerless home; his father, unsociable, and abstracted from all common interests; his mother—it was Lance's silence that spoke here, or rather the grave, cold

respect with which he mentioned her name. And Maxy—the one pleasure that was also the keenest pain, since how could he watch with indifference a childhood already heavily weighted, to ease or brighten which so little pains were taken—it was only here that for a few moments Lance spoke with bitterness.

Ursula listened breathlessly. He must have read her sympathy in her face, but she could not say anything, for the very strength of her feeling stifled its utterance. The time passed by unheeded by them both, and Nigel's shout from the bank startled them at last. There he stood, laughing, and waving his straw hat to them. The sun had set, and only the red after-glow rested on woods and river. The cows had gone home, and the boat, neglected by Lance, had drifted out into the middle of the stream. He seized the oars and pushed her rapidly back to the bank.

Ursula never forgot the row home that evening. It was late, and both Lance and

Nigel were rowing too vigorously for many words. The boat shot with quick smoothness through the twilight, and the shadowy reaches of the river lay dark and shining before them. Ursula, as she steered, watched the dim banks flitting by, and the rowers bending regularly to their oars.

"And I never said a word to him," she thought. "Somehow everything seemed too weak and commonplace to say; and now, after this long silence, how can I begin? I know I shall not be able to get out a single sentence, and he will be sorry that he told me." The words she would fain have said seemed to have buried themselves too deep down in her heart for her to be able to reach them.

Already they had come to the last curve of the river, and passed the rock overhung with ivy that was close to home. There were the lights in the windows of the Old Bridge House, and the glimmer of the guelder-roses on the terrace walls. Lance left them at the landing-place, where the

dew lay heavy on the grass, and the syringas filled the air with perfume.

"Good-night," he said to Ursula; "and thank you for your patient listening."

"But you will come home with us, won't you?" she said.

"Thank you, no, not to-night."

Lance lingered, turned from her, and looked steadily at the lighted windows above them. "Miss Ruthven, you once said that all your sympathy was with success."

"I did not know then," whispered Ursula.

"I never forgot it," went on Lance; "for I know that all my life is one great failure."

"Self-sacrifice is not failure," said Ursula, almost too low for him to catch the words; but he turned to her quickly.

"God bless you for your kindness in saying that! I used to think you would speak just as Austin did. I know you better now. Good-night." And he went away.

Ursula went up to her own room, and stood at the open window in the dusk, letting the flower-scented air come in and cool her flushed cheeks.

"I never guessed, I never understood," she said to herself. "And Austin Hope knew this beautiful story, and yet could speak of him as he did to me. But Austin Hope would never have been capable of such self-denial as this. He could not even understand it. And I have thought and spoken as if he were not worthy of Austin's friendship. I might have known, I might have guessed that he had some reason only too noble for other people to enter into."

Perhaps Ursula thought too highly of Lance's conduct, but it was natural that she should do so. The reaction of feeling was strong, albeit some time ago she had begun to trust, without understanding, Lance. All that love of self-sacrifice that was inherent in her nature rose up to honour him. "Poor fellow, poor fellow," she repeated

to herself, "so hardly dealt with, so misunderstood! How one longs to comfort him!"

There were no more evenings on the river for a long time after this. Nigel was too busy.

"Ursula," said Captain Ruthven, at the close of one of those long, hot days—he came round the angle of the house with hushed footsteps, and spoke almost in a whisper—"Ursula, I am happy to tell you that he is painting still."

Ursula was sitting on the terrace, with a ponderous volume open upon her knees. She had been bending over it for nearly an hour past, but some link in the triple cord of communication between her book, her eyes, and her understanding, must have been broken, for the words of wisdom inscribed on the "learned page" carried very little meaning to her mind.

"Painting still, father?" she said. "I am very glad."

"I just looked in upon him," said Captain Ruthven, "and there he was, hard at it.

He hardly even noticed me, so I stole away. I don't think I can have disturbed him."

"Oh no, no fear."

Captain Ruthven sat down on the terrace wall. "My dear boy!" he said, with glistening eyes. "I really think, Ursula, that this may be the turning-point. He may really settle down to work now. He wanted a start, you see. Every one wants a start, and I am half inclined to think that he has got his now. I have seen several times lately that you were anxious, Ursula, my dear—very natural that you should be. I confess I have been a little anxious myself, off and on; but now I think I see daylight."

"Yes, I am so glad," repeated Ursula.

"I like the picture," continued Captain Ruthven; "I like the picture very much. Of course, one can scarcely judge of it in its present state, but still one gets an idea. Yes, you know of old that I am not easily satisfied; but I am pleased with this. Just

you mark my words, it will be a very fine bit of painting."

"Indeed, I hope it will," said Ursula, striving to make her voice ring a true echo to the glad hopefulness in her father's tone. "How delightful it will be!"

Captain Ruthven began to weave visions, as fast as ever did Perrette in the old French fable. Already he saw the name of the picture in the charmed pages of the Royal Academy Catalogue. Nay, better still, already the art criticisms were coming out in the *Times*. Did he read, or did he only dream the words, "Mr. Nigel Ruthven, by his delicious little picture, 'Before the Gloaming' (No. 694), has at once established his claim to a place on the walls of the Academy. He has shown——" What had Nigel shown most?—"remarkable breadth and freedom of handling, felicitous combination of colour, masterly power of grouping——"

"Doesn't Nigel want anything to eat?" asked Ursula; and therewith the critic and

his article went back to dreamland, while the *pot-au-lait*, fair, fragile thing, fell shattered to the ground.

"That's just it, Ursula. I confess I am rather anxious about Nigel. I think he is overdoing it now. For these last three days he has not given himself proper time to eat or sleep. It's a pity he can't do things in moderation. What's the good of overtaxing his strength and brain? Still, I hardly like to interfere. What do you say, Ursula?"

"I am a little afraid, too," said Ursula, hesitating. "I am afraid of his getting tired of his picture, if he works at it so incessantly."

"Nonsense, child; that's not it. I'm not afraid of that. It doesn't look very like being tired of painting, when he can scarcely speak to one or swallow a glass of wine. That's not what troubles me. What I am afraid of is that he will make himself ill, and then he won't be able to paint at all."

"Oh, do you know, I am not much afraid

of that, father dear," said Ursula. "Besides, he must leave off soon. The light will not be good enough much longer."

"It isn't good enough for anything now," said Nigel's voice behind her. "I have had to knock off work. It's pitch dark round there in my painting-room. Dear me! I'm tired." (He looked more pleased and exhilarated than tired.) "Well, Ursula, what have you been about? What's your book—'Butler's Analogy'? Good gracious! what a tough morsel for a summer's evening!"

"She's quite right—very good book. I like to see girls improving their minds," said Captain Ruthven, with his universal complacency.

"I wasn't improving my mind, I'm afraid," said Ursula; "I was only thinking."

"So much the better. I'm glad to hear it. Always think over what you have been reading."

"Oh, but, father dear, you see, I wasn't thinking about my book at all," said Ursula, with a laugh and a blush; and then she saw

that Lance had followed Nigel on to the terrace, and, as she got up to shake hands with him, Bishop Butler fell heavily to the ground.

"Weighty enough inside and out," said Nigel, stooping to pick up the book. "It must have been hard work enough to hold the learned Bishop without reading him."

"You're hardly the right person to complain of any one's doing a hard day's work," said Captain Ruthven proudly.

"No," and Nigel spread out his arms stiffly, and clasped them above his head. "Haven't I been a good boy? Twelve hours nearly at a stretch! Hope could hardly have beaten that, could he, Lance?"

"I am sure you will be pleased with Nigel's picture, Gwynne. I should like you to come and look at it, and give us your opinion."

"The light is hardly good enough," put in Ursula.

"No, no; there's no light at all," said Nigel. "I don't want Lance to come

bothering just now. I've had enough of the picture for to-day."

"Well, well, as you please, my boy; only remember that criticism is a valuable thing, a very valuable thing."

"So it is, dad, very; and you shall come and criticise yourself as much as ever you like. Here comes some coffee, thank goodness."

They drank coffee and sat chatting in the twilight. Captain Ruthven was very happy, full of talk; and Nigel brightened more and more under the influence of his father's pleasure. He drew him out, and got him to tell long stories of his old fighting days in India.

"Yes," said Captain Ruthven at last, "stormy days those; but very long ago. That was before I knew——"

The sentence was left unfinished, for it was very seldom he named his wife except when he was alone with Nigel.

"I used to think in those days that there was no life like a soldier's, and to dream of

being a great man one day, a general or what not. Times change, and now"—he stroked his son's arm lovingly—"now, I shall be well content, Nigel—well content, my boy, if I see you an R.A. before I die."

For an instant there came a look of great sadness over Nigel's face, and he shook his head. The next he turned to his father more gaily than ever. "All right, dad, but let us go to the top of the tree while we are about it. What's the good of stopping half way? Let's be President of the Royal Academy, and Sir Nigel, and all the rest of it."

"With all my heart, Sir Nigel, with all my heart," said his father, rubbing his hands in delight.

"And now, dad, come and take a turn with me. I haven't had a breath of fresh air all day."

They sauntered off together, Captain Ruthven's arm thrown over his son's shoulder, and his laugh coming back cheerily to Lance and Ursula.

They looked at each other and smiled, but the little scene had touched them. There was something almost mournful about the father's intense pride in, and love for, his "boy"; and sister and friend alike shared the foreboding that his hopes were doomed to disappointment. Each had caught the sudden change of expression on Nigel's face, as if the knowledge of his own want of sustained power had flashed across him for an instant.

Ursula felt that she loved her father and brother both so dearly at that moment. The possibility of sorrow coming to either of them cut her to the heart. Try as she would to stop them, the big tears would well from under her drooped eyelashes, and fall upon her hands.

"Ursula," said Lance in a low voice.

His eyes, too, had grown dim as he looked after the father and son, but now he had turned back to Ursula.

She looked up, brushing her hand quickly over her eyes; but something she saw in

Lance's face made it all to do over again, fresh tears would come.

"I oughtn't to cry," she said hastily, "but it seems sad. Poor Nigel, dear Nigel! he cannot help it, I suppose; but oh! our dear, dear old father."

"He is very hopeful," said Lance.

"He always is, and so patient; but I——"

"You cannot be hopeful too?"

"Oh no. I used to be. I always was. I used to have such dreams for him, but I don't now. I often think now that there never will be anything but dreams for Nigel."

"Does he think that himself?"

"Only for a moment sometimes, as he did just now. No, he is generally quite content to float easily down stream. Oh!"—and she clasped her hands—"how one does long for something real to rest on and fight for!"

"Ursula," said Lance quickly, and again he stopped as if he could not make his voice as steady as he would, "once I

should have said to you, come and help me to fight; but I can't now—I mustn't. There is no struggle for you to share—to brighten. Ursula, I would have done my best."

She had risen surprised, when he began to speak, and now for one moment she laid her hand lightly on his arm.

He took it and held it in both of his, and went on in a voice that he kept resolutely quiet—

"I know you were speaking about Nigel. I ought not to have thought about myself. Forgive me; but it is too hard always to stand aside and to say nothing. Let me speak this once. You said just now that you wanted something real to rest on; I might have been that, I think, if my life had been as it once was. I know how I could have striven. And, Ursula, indeed it is hard, because if it could have been—if I could have asked—I sometimes have a fancy that you would have come to me."

"Yes," said Ursula softly, "and yet I think I had rather——"

She tried to draw away her hand, but he held it too fast.

“ You had rather, Ursula—— ? ”

“ I think—I had rather come to you as it is.”

He stood silent for a minute, still clasping her hand.

“ Will you say that again ? ” he asked ; and his voice changed in spite of his efforts.

“ I might mistake.”

But Ursula looked up at him this time, and if she did say anything it was only with her eyes.

A peal of bells, merry and soft, rang out from a distant church-tower. The ringers were practising, perhaps, for some wedding near at hand, who knows ? The river that had been such a good friend to Lance and Ursula, rippled musically down below. The exquisite evening hush was broken by no other sounds, and the two who stood there with their hands clasped together were too happy for more words.

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"Ursula and Lance!" said Nigel;
"Lance and Ursula! Who would have
thought it—our little Ursula and Lance
Gwynne! Well, wonders will never cease."

"You are very much surprised," said his
father. "I was surprised myself."

They were talking in Nigel's painting-room. Even the picture had for the moment been postponed to discussing the great event of the evening before, and Nigel was balancing himself on the window-sill, with his palette and brushes in his hand.

"Yes, I must confess I am surprised."

"And yet young Gwynne has been a great deal with you?"

"Yes, so he has, and he and Ursula have had a good deal of talk to themselves; but, to tell the truth, I thought that Ursula, poor dear, believed herself to have a mission to him, and to have been charged to win him back to the noble confraternity of all true artists."

"Charged by whom? Austin Hope?"

"Austin Hope, of course; and furthermore, father, I used to think——"

"So did I," quietly said Captain Ruthven.

Nigel laughed heartily. "No; did you really? Imagine the dear old father match-making! But I did think that Hope, with his genius and his *brusquerie* and his enthusiasm, had rather caught our little Ursula's fancy. She has got plenty of ambition, and I thought she would have liked belonging to a successful artist, such as he is."

"It would have been very suitable," said Captain Ruthven gravely. "Hope would have been a most useful friend to you."

"If being eclipsed and lectured is useful, very," muttered Nigel; "but I'll tell you what, father, Lance is one of the best fellows in all the world."

"I don't much like that business of changing his profession, though. It looks to me like a certain amount of instability of character. I like people to stick to one thing, especially when they have chosen such a noble calling as yours."

"I suspect Lance had good reasons for changing. Come in, Ursula; we are talking

about you," he added, as Ursula's bright face peeped in at the half-open door. "You and Lance are making me waste the whole of my valuable morning." And he went back to his easel.

"I was just saying, Ursula, my dear, that I regret Lance Gwynne's having given up his profession."

"And I am proud of it," said Ursula, standing in the middle of the floor, with a flush of colour and sparkling eyes—"prouder than if he had painted the finest picture that ever was seen in the world."

Nigel turned half round and smiled, touching her lightly on the cheek with the end of his mahl stick.

"I am, Nigel."

"I don't quite understand you, Ursula," observed Captain Ruthven, puzzled and rather shocked.

"Oh, father," she said, "I am sure you don't know how it came about, or you would understand better than anybody."

Lance's account of himself to her had been

but a plain, unvarnished tale. The facts, as Ursula told them, were the same, but her bright imagination lent them quite a new glow of colour. In her hands the *mise en scene* became really picturesque. Mrs. Gwynne would scarcely have recognized herself as the stern but beneficent guardian angel, keeping her faithful watch over the entrance of that silent room, where the scholar, pale, worn, yet unwearied, bent early and late over his books. At all events Ursula had not learnt from Lance any bitter feeling towards his mother. She described the anxiety that Mrs. Gwynne kept courageously to herself—the carking care not to be shared by her husband, the burden that by degrees grew too heavy to be carried longer by herself; finally, the sending for her son, and Lance's coming—his feet just firmly fixed on the ladder of fame, his heart filled to overflowing with brilliant hopes—to be met by the chilling question, “Will you give all up?”

The rest Ursula could not speak of

calmly. Words failed her to tell of the shock, the struggle, the victory, and, since then, the silent bearing of hard judgments and of a broken life. She tried to go on, and failed. "Father, you see now."

Her impulsive old father was quite carried away by the story. His own eyes were overflowing.

"See, Ursula? I should think I did, my dear. The poor, good laddie, the brave boy! I say it was well done. I never heard of a finer thing. I long to shake him by the hand, Ursula, and tell him that I am sure such a good son will make the best of husbands to my little girl."

Nigel was silent, but it was not the silence of indifference. There was a fold between his eyes that told of deep feeling, though he only gave a short nod when his father appealed to him to confirm his praise of Lance.

"A bad fellow may admire a good one, Ursie, I suppose?" he said to her with a sort of sad gaiety of manner, when they were

left alone. "I always said your Lance was one of the best men I know. I only wish the old man here had got a son like him."

"Dear Nigel, oh, dear Nigel, you are! you are going to be everything he wants."

Nigel shrugged his shoulders like a Frenchman.

"*Qui vivra verra*," he said lightly. "At all events, little woman, will it please you to stand out of my light just now?"

Ursula was very happy, but perhaps she had never longed so much after the mother she could scarcely remember as at this time. Both her father and Nigel, it is true, gave her the most real sympathy they were capable of, yet Ursula still felt dimly that there was something wanting to her joy.

One day she went down to the village to see the old woman there whom she called her friend, and to tell her something of her new happiness. She felt as if what was filling her heart would be better met and shared by the poor old widow than by either father or brother. She could not have put

into words what it was that inspired her with so much confidence in one who differed widely from her in age and life, in mode of speech, and ways of thought. But all the same, when Ursula entered the cottage and drew up a little wooden stool to the side of the old woman's elbow-chair, she was sure already that she had judged rightly.

It was such an atmosphere of peace ; not outwardly, for though Widow West was alone in the cottage at that moment, she lived in a large noisy household, with her son and his loud-tongued talking wife, and a set of rough grandchildren, who were sometimes good to "granny" and oftener forgot her. But none of these things ruffled her. The peace in her grand old face was not to be broken by "earth's ruder noise"—it was more deeply rooted than that ; it was "not the peace that brooded over Eden, but that which crowned Gethsemane." Words cannot give an idea of that look. There was more in it than mere serenity: joy, divine joy, shone round her like a halo.

"Oh, Widow West," said Ursula, leaning her arm on the old woman's knee, and looking up into the bright, sweet face, "I am so happy—so very happy. I wanted to come and talk to you." And she told her about Lance.

"The Lord be praised," said the old woman, lifting up her hands joyfully. "'Tis His doing. A good partner comes from Him. How He does love to see you glad, my dear. I knew He would. I ha' spoke to Him ofttimes in my poor way, and told Him how good you ha' been to me, and that He would reward you for me; and He has. 'Dear Lord,' I said, 'she's a blessed young lady; you love her more than I do: bless her dear heart, give her all the good things here and a bright coming to the Kingdom.' And He ha' heard. I was right sure He would."

She looked upwards still, with a smile on her moving lips; and Ursula, awestruck, felt that indeed she talked with God.

"He always listens," she said. "It's

beautiful. I ha' talked with Him this many a year, and ha' told Him all my need, and He ha' help me. I say to Him, 'I can't sing Thy praises, Lord, with my poor old voice, for you know 'tis cracked; but I do sing in my heart, and I shall soon sing in your heaven.' "

"Do you love Him so much?" said Ursula wistfully; for she felt that there was something in this joy that went far beyond her own, something in this love that satisfied. She had read of it, heard of it, but she had never seen it bright and living until now.

"Can I choose but love Him," said the old woman, "for He loves *me*? Can I help thinking long till I get to Him?" She folded her hands and sat thinking for a little space; then she said, "I never had any learning, you know, my dear, not to call book learning, so I can't speak it out right; but a while ago I was sitting here in my chair alone, and they were all gone a-gleaning, as it might be now. Daughter-in-law's

bees, they were getting ready to swarm in the apple-tree out yonder; and when I saw them all clustering on one bough, so thick together, one upon another, poor things, thinks I, that's like Him, that branch; that's like my dear Lord will be in heaven, just weighted with souls, all striving who can get most nigh Him."

A poor, rude image that Ursula scarcely understood, yet to the old woman's mind bearing a true emblem of Him whom she had long found "sweeter than honey and the honeycomb."

"I wish that I was like you," said Ursula, feeling for the moment most truly what she said.

Widow West took up the girl's hand and kissed it.

"My dear," she said, "I came to Him through a many tears. He found me hard to win; but, praise be to His name, He didn't tire. He never does tire. Through a sight o' sorrow He have brought me home."

Words that long afterwards Ursula remembered — “ Won through a ‘sight’ of sorrow, and through many tears.”

But such things as tears and sorrow seemed very far off now. How happy they were ! Of course there was no thought of their being married for many a long day. That was but a distant air-castle in the golden cloudland, that would become real and descend on to common earth some day, when, oh, so many things had happened—when the Bank had made Lance’s fortune ; when the great work was out ; when Lance could buy a little house standing in a garden, into which was to open one sunny, flowery, earthly paradise kind of a room that was to belong to Maxy.

At first Maxy would not take kindly to that prospective room of his. The idea of Ursula as belonging to Lance was a wonderfully new and startling one. It came upon him with a sudden jar and shock, and for a time—the truth must out—poor Maxy was jealous.

He loved Lance so entirely. How could he bear being first with him no longer? It was not often that Maxy thought much about himself. This was the only time when any good to his brother failed to make his heart throb fast with joy.

But when Lance, in the flush of his new gladness, brought Ursula to show her to Maxy—when Maxy saw them coming in together, and caught the proud look in his brother's eyes, a quick sharp pain seemed to strike through his heart. He had much of the same temperament as his artist brother, the same appreciation and intense delight in beauty. He looked now at the delicate oval face, at the sweet loving brown eyes, at the lithe graceful figure. Lance wondered to see a quiver pass over his face, and as Ursula knelt down beside him, he let her take his hand, but turned his head away.

"She is beautiful," he thought passionately, "and she is strong and well. She can walk with Lance, she can run

after him everywhere, and I must just lie here."

"Maxy," said Lance. He spoke rather low, but there was a shade of displeasure in the tone.

Maxy flushed crimson. He turned slowly, and raised his eyes to Lance's. His was a strong nature. A brief silence, a brave struggle, and the momentary agony was gone. His faith in Lance rushed back, and, frankly penitent, both his hands were stretched out to Ursula in welcome.

He did well to trust a love so true and deep as Lance's—a love so real that, even in those first days, he and Ursula could not look at life through their rose-coloured spectacles without trying to fit them on to Maxy's nose also.

Among Lance's hopes was not one of returning to his old profession. That was entirely out of the question, he told Ursula, silencing her decidedly the first time she spoke about it. But on all other subjects he was ready to build impossible castles

in the air, and to laugh over their lack of solid foundation, and to be young and happy beyond anything that Ursula could have imagined of him.

How merry they were in those golden harvest days! Ursula could not shake her head even when Nigel deserted "Before the Gloaming," and insisted on making a picture of the memorable boat scene. She and Lance were ready enough to sit in their former places, and talk and laugh while Nigel sketched them from the bank.

But it would not do. Nigel said their attitudes were no longer in harmony with the quiet sunset light, and they discovered that the evenings were closing in so fast that it grew chilly on the water. Was summer over? Well, brightly tinted autumn would be just as beautiful. Need it bring any clouds?

Only just this one—that with the short days and falling leaves, Nigel's content seemed to fade away. He grew bored and restless, found that the climate depressed

him, and talked of the *mal du pays*. Among the advantages of being such a cosmopolitan as Nigel was that of being able to indulge in the *mal du pays* for more countries than one.

He was only wasting his time now, he said, buried in this little out-of-the-way country corner. Perhaps it was true. At all events, when October came, Nigel went south with the swallows.

CHAPTER VIII.

MORE than a year has passed.

It is a November day, not very cheerful anywhere, but especially gloomy in the large counting-house of the Marlixtowe Bank, where there reigns a very tolerable imitation of a London fog.

Gas is burning here and there, the yellow rays of light speedily losing themselves in the thick atmosphere. The line of windows looks as if all the blinds were down, but it is only grey mist that shades them. It will be dark very early this afternoon.

An inner door is pushed open, and Lance Gwynne receives a summons into Mr. Deane's private room—no unusual thing; for ever since the fire that happened

the summer before last, Lance has been rising steadily in the esteem of Messrs. Deane and Co. Perhaps his industry, clearness of head, and power of application, had begun to win him golden opinions before, but he had never been conscious of it until then. Since that night he has been treated as a friend, not only by his old school-fellow Godfrey Deane, but by his father, the head of the house.

Lance takes it very quietly, as he does most things; but he is glad for many reasons.

As he rises from his desk and passes under one of the gas-lamps its light falls full upon him for a moment. The months that have passed have brought but little change to him outwardly. Perhaps there is more light in his eyes, and his lips have taken a less severe and melancholy curve. He is certainly more friendly and familiar with his brother clerks, and he has the gift, possessed by some reserved people, of winning hearts without trying to do so. Every one likes to be noticed by him; all say now that

Gwynne is one of the best fellows going, when once you come to know him.

If Lance has his dark hours still—hours in which the old passion rises in his heart as strong as ever—he keeps them closely to himself. If there are times when he thinks of his former friends, with a bitterness he feels powerless to subdue, no one knows it. He had never grudged them their successes; if now he still envies them the brush they hold, the canvas they work upon, the very mixing of the colours on the palette, outwardly he gives no sign. He said long ago that he felt strong enough to carry through his conquest over himself, and he has done it.

At the one time he needed help, when for a space his courage and endurance had seemed about to fail him, help had been given. Ursula had come to bring back hope and purpose into his life; not his first purpose or his chosen hope, it is true, but he loved her, and his love had saved him. He wishes to get on now, works

steadily for promotion, sees that there may be interest even in the drudgery which he used to despise as well as hate.

He deliberately thinks that he has fallen to a lower level, and this slow dawning of content does not raise him in his own opinion, but he has nerved himself to walk without flinching in the lowlier path, and he has no fear of failure now. This is what the last year has brought to Lance.

Certainly, in many ways his life is most monotonous; but he expects no changes, and has no wish for any at present.

"Gwynne," said Mr. Deane, as Lance opened the door of the banker's private room, "is that you? Come in here a moment. I find that I must send you at once on important business to Rome."

Mr. Deane was standing before a blazing fire; the small room was fully and brightly lighted. Either that or his words rather dazed Lance for a minute as he came in from the dull counting-house.

"You speak Italian, I have always under-

stood. Yes? And you know Rome. So far good. Besides, my son Godfrey, who is there—you are to act with him, you see—writes to me that he will have no one but you sent to him from here.”

Lance's head was spinning round. That Fortune, turning her “wild wheel, through sunshine, storm, and cloud,” should have turned it to such purpose as to send him to Rome, was undoubtedly a thing he had never dreamed of. That he should be sent there as a banker's clerk! He was excessively disconcerted and perplexed for many reasons. On the whole, he would rather have been told that he was to go to Siberia than to Rome, but it never entered into his thoughts to remonstrate.

“In fact,” Mr. Deane continued, “Godfrey might safely have left me to decide that point myself, for it would be absurd to send any of the fellows from here who have never been out of England. And Godfrey is such an uncertain man. He may be at Rome, he may be at Naples, he may be at

Kamschatka, for aught I know. You will have to wait for him, Gwynne, for the power of attorney to act for us is made out in his name."

"Yes, sir," said Lance, recovering voice enough to pronounce those two syllables.

"You had better start soon, and you had better travel fast, as the best chance of catching Godfrey. Upon my word, I envy you getting a glimpse of the sun," he continued, with a glance out of the window at the twilight of frosty fog. "I wish I could go myself."

Lance wished so too very cordially. That sentence about starting soon had scattered all his thoughts again, though he managed a smile and a few proper words about "Rather a better climate than ours just now."

But to go immediately! Should he favour Mr. Deane with a page of family history, and ask for a little delay? Should he tell him that old Jane was laid up with rheumatic fever, and that Maxy——?

But Mr. Deane was still talking. "So there's not a day to be lost in the business. I give you my word, Gwynne, you are a perfect godsend to me at this moment. It isn't every day one gets a clerk ready made to one's hand, who has Italian at his fingers' ends, and is more at home in Rome than at Marlixtowe—and a good business man to boot. Now, just sit down, and I will give you your instructions."

Lance soon saw that the mission on which he was to be sent was an important and, to some extent, a responsible one. The great man of the Marlixtowe neighbourhood, Sir John Clavering, had just died suddenly at Rome, and was greatly in debt to the Marlixtowe Bank. It was to assist in recovering this debt that Lance was going out. The business promised to be a complicated one, for Sir John had married an Italian, and all the unentailed property which he possessed was invested in Italy. It was useless dreaming of delay.

"Well," he said to himself, as he put on

his greatcoat presently in the empty counting-house, and ran down the bank steps into a sea of fog. "Well, wonders will never cease, as poor old Jane said when she got rheumatic fever. Here am I off to Rome; but that's the least of it."

The least of it, truly. There was something on the eve of happening much more wonderful than that. Mr. and Mrs. Gwynne were going to Madrid!

The great work had made astonishing strides during the last year. Several volumes, at least, according to Mrs. Gwynne, had been completely finished. It had very nearly burst upon the world this Christmas, but it was difficult for any one to conceive what a tremendous part of history was that of the fifteenth century. The most complicated and mysterious political machinery had been at work; wheels within wheels revolved in the diplomatic circles of that memorable time. Without access to certain documents and rare books, it was quite impossible that the history should be made

as comprehensive and exhaustive as had always been designed, and these documents were in the library of the Escorial.

It followed, as a matter of necessity, that to the Escorial Mrs. Gwynne must go—that, of course, is to say, Mr. Gwynne must go, conducted or escorted by his wife.

He himself had been overwhelmed at first by the greatness of the scheme. It was too much. They really should be carrying things too far, and he could not justify the step to himself. No, it would be wiser to remain at home and do the best they could with authorities to be found in London or at Oxford. Besides, he really did not feel equal to the enterprise.

But Mrs. Gwynne was undaunted, and, as usual, she carried her point. Once more she made an appeal to Lance's generosity. He was getting on well: she knew he would not refuse to help his father. Lance made no remonstrance. Long ago he had learnt to look on the great work as the Leah for whom his term of service must be com-

pleted before he could begin to work for Ursula. He used to call her his Rachel, and laughingly to accuse her of not being properly jealous of her rival.

For Ursula had a queer sort of sympathy with the progress of "Gwynne's History of the Fifteenth Century"; she liked to see an enterprise so obstinately carried out, and difficulties so resolutely met. She felt that for any object which Lance had at heart, she could have toiled and striven as Mrs. Gwynne had done; and now and then she gave a sigh at the thought that none of the self-sacrifice of which she knew herself to be capable was likely to be required of her. At a distance she respected and approved of Mrs. Gwynne.

It was generous of her, for certainly the welcome Mrs. Gwynne had accorded to her as a future daughter-in-law was of the coldest. Lance's mother, also, seeing the girl beautiful and well-favoured, looked on her as a Rachel, and trembled lest she should come in the way of her son's fealty

towards the darling object of her own idolatry.

There was very little intercourse between the Old Bridge House and the Abbey Road. Captain Ruthven would willingly have lavished the most cordial interest and reverence on the great work, but his overtures only covered its author with shyness and embarrassment, and Mrs. Gwynne would not allow him to be "unsettled." She would not let Ursula see even Maxy often, and never left them alone together, to Lance's great disappointment. He had so counted on those two making friends.

It was, however, many months now since Lance himself had seen Ursula—six long months at least. Yes, he remembered it well—it was early in the month of May (because the Royal Academy was just open, and you could not take up a newspaper without finding it full of criticisms on the pictures), when he and Ursula went up the hill one evening to see the sun set over the Welsh mountains.

Before they set off Ursula happened to keep him waiting for a little while, and he noticed that Captain Ruthven, who was sitting in a despondent attitude over the fire, seemed unusually silent and out of spirits. He looked up after a time, and folding a newspaper, pushed it to Lance across the table. "Have you looked at yesterday's *Times*? They praise your friend Hope's pictures up to the skies."

Lance read eagerly, and with a glow of pleasure. Austin's pictures were praised heartily, and criticised fairly and kindly. It was the sort of notice to satisfy any young artist.

"I once hoped to have seen Nigel's name among them this year," murmured Captain Ruthven, speaking more to himself than to his companion. "One must be patient, but the waiting tries one, and I fear——"

If Lance heard he did not heed. He turned the pages and read on fascinated. Ah! this was one of the moments he dreaded—a glimpse of the old world. He

stood outside the gate of paradise for an instant, and gazed, entranced, at the glories within. But only for an instant. Ursula came in, and he threw the paper down with a muttered "What a fool I was to read all that!"

They went out together. Lance did not talk as usual, but neither did Ursula. The sunset was very fine, well worth climbing a steeper hill to see, but they gave it none of the attention it merited. Ursula was the first to speak.

"Lance," she asked, "something has vexed you?"

"Has it?" Lance took off his hat and passed his hand over his forehead. "It was very stupid of me to be vexed," he said with a smile.

"If you look troubled," Ursula continued, "it will be harder still to go away and leave you. Did not father say anything to you? I thought he had been telling you. Yes, dear Lance"—in answer to his start and grasp on her arm—"we are going away.

It is better for father. Haven't you seen it? He is growing restless here, and wearying to get to Nigel. Ever since we heard of Nigel's being at Avignon, father has been longing to go there. I oughtn't to try and keep him here. No, Lance, he and I must go after our poor Nigel."

There had been trouble about Nigel since he left Marlixtowe in the winter, and it had told heavily on his father. They heard of him at rare intervals; first at the Hague and Antwerp, then at Dresden. After that he went to Paris, and a long silence followed. Captain Ruthven would never show, even to Ursula, the letter that broke it; but she knew that Nigel had been gambling, that he asked for money, and that he wrote in bitter penitence and remorse.

The money was sent without a single harsh word, and Nigel was not there to read that deepest of all reproaches—the sorrow printed on his father's face.

But, really sad and penitent for the moment, he had left Paris, and had gone

“home,” as he called it, to Avignon. His grandfather’s brother, l’Oncle Pierre, now occupied the old atelier. To hear of Nigel working there—living in the dear rooms once brightened by his young mother’s presence—painting on the familiar easel, and looking out of the well-remembered window, across the court with the vine trellis and the fountain, made Captain Ruthven’s heart yearn irresistibly over his son.

Nigel wrote charming letters, giving half playful, half touching pictures of the simple, primitive life he was leading. L’Oncle Pierre, now a very old man, though he was Achille la Grange’s younger brother, longed, so Nigel said, with quite a pitiful longing, to see his niece’s daughter once again. She had been his darling as a child, and now *la petite Ursule* was rarely out of his thoughts.

“Father thinks,” said Ursula, with a smile and a sigh, “that we are going for his sake. I used to be very fond of l’Oncle Pierre—how bad his pictures were!—and

perhaps he remembers me a little; but—Nigel is there.”

So they went, leaving the Old Bridge House just as the tardy sweetness of the English spring was stealing over it like a smile. They went—“rolling stones that gathered no moss,” said Ursula, with her pretty sorrowful smile, and the place was left very deserted-looking. Lance used to go over there sometimes, into the closed-up airless rooms, and, unbarring the shutters, look down upon the terrace and the river, wondering where the magic of the view had gone. The summer did not bring back Ursula and her father, though Nigel had again left Avignon. “He is gone to work in North Italy,” wrote Ursula to Lance. “And whenever we talk of England l’Oncle Pierre says he is dying. He is very well and very happy, poor dear, at other times. It is not only on his account we stay—father is happier, I see, waiting here for Nigel. Lance, how he loves him, with what a sublime and patient love!

Sometimes I say to myself, the good God loves us all as father loves Nigel, and it makes me glad to think it."

Lance had this letter in his pocket at the time of his interview with Mr. Deane, and as he walked quickly down the Abbey Road, guiding himself through the fog, by feeling his way along the garden walls, he had time to think that Avignon was on the high-road to Rome, and that either in going or returning, there would surely be in store for him a glimpse of Ursula's bright face.

But just now his chief care was for Maxy. Mrs. Gwynne and he were already at issue as to where the boy was to spend the time of his mother's absence in Spain. Old Jane, in whose faithful care he could have been so safely left, was just recovering from rheumatic fever, and had gone to a nephew in the Isle of Wight to regain her strength.

Mrs. Gwynne made up her mind to send Maxy to her only sister, and this plan Lance heartily disapproved.

Mrs. Griffiths was a widow, living in

Wales with a stepson, whose house she kept. This stepson was the manager of some great slate-quarries among the Welsh hills—a grand, wild country, but altogether too bleak and out of the way, Lance thought, to be fit for Maxy.

The two sisters had met very seldom for many years past, and Lance had not seen his aunt above three times in his life; but these few meetings had been enough to make him dislike trusting her with Maxy. If he had been undutiful enough to clothe his impression of her in words, he might have said that she was too like his mother, but Lance tried not to believe that he really felt that.

Something, however, in her eyes, in her hands, and in her meagre dress suggested to him that she was miserly. But he had no tangible objection to urge, and his remonstrances were in vain. His mother had made her decision irrevocably. Her sister Patience told her of the pure mountain air, and a bracing climate would be the very

thing for Maxy. She supposed Lance would allow her to judge what she thought best for her own child. Lance had no choice but to yield. He made up his mind to watch closely over Maxy's welfare and happiness while he was at Abervelly, and if he saw him flag in any way to take the matter into his own hands at once. This journey to Rome left him helpless. True, it was but a vague mistrust he felt, but it made him uneasy.

The impression was still strong upon him when, in the darkness of the early morning next day, he went into his brother's room, prepared for a journey, and carrying a candle in his hand. It seemed still the middle of the night to Maxy, but he was wide awake, sitting up shivering in his bed, and trying to keep his heart up.

"Going already, Lance? Isn't it very cold?" he asked, with chattering teeth.

Lance put down the candle, and sat on the edge of the bed, his face nearly as troubled as his brother's.

“Maxy,” he said very gravely, “I shall be off in a minute or two, and I want you to listen to me. I don’t think there’s a chance of my being home before father and mother go, and I can’t quite tell you why I am uneasy at leaving you. I dare say I am a fool for my pains”—holding the boy, who was nestling up to him, still closer—“but that can’t be helped. I want you to give me a promise, a solemn promise, mind. Are you listening?”

Maxy nodded.

“A promise that if you are ill or unhappy, or want me in any way, you will write to me at once, and I shall come home, by hook or by crook, with Godfrey Deane’s permission, or without it.”

“Very well,” said Maxy.

“That won’t do,” resumed Lance. “Give me your hand. There, say, ‘I give you my word of honour.’ That’s right. Now I shall be comfortable. Look, I have put some envelopes ready stamped in this case for you. I must be off now.”

"Oh, Lance, not quite directly."

"Yes, now. What's the good of waiting? After all, Maxy, it may be very jolly over there in Wales."

"Oh yes, very jolly," said Maxy with a gasp.

"That's right, little Hopeful. My boy, God bless you!"

Gone! Maxy put his head down on the little black writing-case that Lance had left upon his pillow.

Lance's other farewell was much more easily gone through. His mother accepted his journey to Rome as calmly as if he had been going to London for the day. She was waiting for him in the hall when he went downstairs, with the front door wide open, and a candle flaring wildly in the draught of cold air.

"You will be late, Lance. You are too fond of running your time fine."

"No fear; I shall catch the train. Good-bye, mother. I hope the great journey will be pleasant."

"I go for duty, not for pleasure," starchy responded Mrs. Gwynne. "Good-bye."

And Lance went out into the starlit, frosty morning.

His mother closed the door after him carefully, and proceeded to improve the shining hour by hunting up little scraps of forgotten dust in the remote corners of the hall.

Godfrey Deane led as easy, useless, and idle a life as could well be imagined. He spent it chiefly in wandering about the world in search of sunshine, antiquities, or sport.

Everybody liked him, for he was clever and good-natured, a capital scholar, a faithful friend, and an easy-going travelling companion. He had got some hunters at Rome, a small yacht in the Bay of Naples, and an intimate acquaintance with every comfortable inn between Chambery and Palermo.

Therefore he was not the easiest man in

the world to find, and when Lance, directly he arrived at Rome, went to inquire for him at his lodgings, he was more vexed than surprised at being met by a nonchalant "*Non c'è.*"

Further questioning only brought out the fact that he had lately left Rome for a little journey, a *piccolino giro*—no one quite knew where; but that he intended to show the South of Italy to a party of friends.

"Where is he now?" impatiently asked Lance.

"*Non saprei,*" responded the Italian placidly.

"And when will he be back?"

The man held out both his hands, and raised his eyebrows, "*Eh, chi lo sa?*"

"Who knows, indeed?" said Lance to himself, as he walked crestfallen away. Clearly there was nothing for it but patience.

Poor Lance! he had rarely found time hang on his hands with so sheer a weight as it did on the following morning.

He stood on the Bridge of Sant' Angelo, looking idly up towards the Castle and St. Peter's, or still more idly down into the tawny stream.

His own sensations puzzled him. He had expected to feel acute pain in returning to Rome, passionate regret, gnawing remorse, loyal yearning love towards the grand old city. But he stood there under the blue sky, amid all the magic of its ancient beauty, and he felt none of these things; only a dull familiarity with the scene, and a shyness that made him lean over the parapet of the bridge, with his back to the passers-by, lest any old friend crossing over should haply recognize him.

He thought that a ghost, forced to return to the scenes of its former life, must feel somewhat like this—as strange, as solitary, as cold, as much ashamed of himself as he did.

There was only one grain of comfort. Austin Hope was spending this winter in Venice. His presence would have been

the straw that breaks the camel's back. "Meanwhile," thought Lance, "what on earth shall I do with myself?" How should he get through the long days that would probably pass before it pleased Mr. Deane to return from his *piccolino giro*?—a *giro* just as likely as not to land him in Sicily or at Algiers.

What should he do? To begin with, that was such an odd question to ask one's self in Rome. Lance laughed silently and not quite gaily. Do? Why, absolutely anything that he had never done before—idle, avoid galleries and churches, shun the Caffè Greco and the dear old back streets where his friends congregated and every second house contained a studio, walk on the Pincio perhaps, and see the world—he should not find many of the artists there.

Thinking thus, he crossed the bridge and went slowly down into Trastevere. There was a bright sun, but a sharp *tramontana* wind was blowing—the sort of Advent-day

every one knows in Rome. Shaggy *pifferari* were piping away; the church bells began tolling and clashing. The mid-day gun pealed out from Sant' Angelo.

"Only twelve o'clock," continued Lance. "Well, I *have* grown prosaic, and no mistake. I did expect to feel something tragic at the first sight of old Rome; but here it is just as jolly, and beautiful, and dirty, the same glorious old place as ever, and I am only wishing for something to do." And he gave an amused sigh, if such a thing be possible, at the remembrance of his high desk at Marlixtowe.

He came to the Corsini Palace and stood still. There was a man lying on a stone bench in the sun. His hat was drawn over his face, shading his eyes from the light, but there was something familiar to Lance in the outline of the figure and the careless attitude, both hands clasped behind the head to form a pillow. He drew nearer. Yes, he was right. No one but Nigel Ruthven could look so comfortable, in

what must in reality be a very uneasy position.

Lance touched his shoulder, and called him by his name. "Nigel, you oughtn't to go to sleep out of doors on a day like this."

"I'm not asleep," answered Nigel, without stirring. Then after a moment he pushed back his hat and looked up. "Lotto,"—Lance's Roman nickname,— "you here! Where, in the name of fortune, do you come from?"

"From England. I have just come over on business from the bank. I had no idea that you were in Rome."

By this time Nigel had raised himself on to his elbow, and interrupted him. "Is it really you, Lance? Somehow I didn't take it in at first. Welcome, old man!"

"Thank you. Why are you lying there?"

"Because I couldn't walk when I tried just now," said Nigel, smiling for the first time, "so I thought I might as well wait."

"Wait? What for?"

"Nothing," and Nigel sank back again. "It's a good thing you have come, or I should never have got home. Oh, those stairs!"

"You've been ill?"

"Of course I have; but I'm better now, only I am rather pulled down, I find."

"I should think so. Why, Nigel, how thin you are!" Lance sat down on the bench, and tried to draw Nigel into a more comfortable attitude, leaning on his shoulder. "There! you oughtn't to have come out. Are you sure you are only weak?"

"I believe so. I'll tell you what, Lance." Nigel stopped, and Lance, bending forward, saw to his dismay that there were big tears in his eyes. "I'm very hungry."

"Hungry! Good Heavens! why don't you eat, then?"

"For one thing,"—the voice was more like Nigel's now—"because I haven't got any money. No, don't rush off to buy food for me just yet. There's no such violent

hurry; I had rather talk to you. Lance, I know you thought long ago that I should come to grief, and I have. You know—my father and Ursula have told you all about it, of course. Well, can't you understand how cut up I have been? I made sure of winning the money back, but some men never have a stroke of luck by any chance. I always lose, for one."

"And a good thing too," observed Lance.

"That may be; I don't see it myself. Anyhow, I couldn't come on the poor old father a third time; and the money was all gone, and I had debts. I tried to clear myself, and I saved. I ate as little as I could—I really did."

"Starved yourself—just like you!"

"And then I got ill. It was at Venice. Of course I wasn't going to have a doctor, and I grew worse and worse. Fevers last so long in Italy, somehow."

"I wonder you didn't die," said Lance.

"So do I, but I am better now." And he sat up and shook back his hair with a well-

remembered gesture. "And I managed to get here—to Rome. I tell you a rich American, Mr. Malcolm—a man I got to know at Milan, gave me a commission before I was ill to copy some Roman pictures for him, or get them copied. He saw some copies of mine he liked. Well, he wanted the 'Carlo Dolci,' here in the Corsini, you know; and to-day I thought I could begin, for I must get some money somehow; but directly I got the brush into my hand I fainted, unluckily. So the *custode*, or somebody, brought me out here, and I was just wondering what would become of me. I'm glad you are come, Lance. That's my history."

"Can you wait here while I get you something to eat?" said Lance.

"Can I do anything else?" responded Nigel, laughing. "I don't believe I can stand alone at present.

"And now I'll tell you what you can do," he said presently, as he finished the last morsel of ham and roll and sausage

that Lance had brought from a neighbouring shop. "It's a lucky day for Mr. Malcolm. You'll copy the 'Carlo Dolci' for me."

"What do you mean? I'm not an artist," said Lance shortly.

"Humbug! I know all that. It won't take you long. My dear Lance, you see you must help me, or I shall die or be put in prison, or something of that sort. And I know you haven't got any money to spare."

"No; I can't say I have."

The bank, of course, paid Lance's expenses; but, between his father's journey to Madrid and the sum he had insisted on leaving for Maxy's extra comforts, his own finances were at the lowest ebb.

"Well then, you'll copy the 'Carlo Dolci.' Mr. Malcolm has gone back to New York, but he left the money at his banker's. I dare say you look down on copying-work; but I can't help that. There's nothing else to be done."

"I tell you I can't paint," said Lance.

"I haven't touched a brush for years. I never paint."

"Then the sooner you begin again the better. I always thought so. I expected Ursula to have set you painting long before this. I wonder what she has been about."

"Pray leave my painting alone," said Lance, "and let me take you home."

This was harder work than he anticipated. The ruinous old palazzo where Nigel had taken up his abode was in the Borgo not far off; but when they reached it, the stairs seemed to Lance perfectly endless. Nigel was very weak; he leant against the wall, gasping for breath, after Lance had half carried, half dragged him up five flights of steps that grew steeper at each storey.

"Another? Why, Nigel, where do you live?" he exclaimed at last, as Nigel still pointed upwards. "We're coming to the roof."

But Nigel shook his head, and panted too much for speech. Lance stood looking

at him in an odd confusion of feeling. The proposal that he should copy the picture had strangely ruffled him. He wanted to put it aside as a simple impossibility, but it would not go out of his head. He could not do it, of course; and yet something must be done for Nigel—Ursula's brother, too. He must be properly looked after. How like him it was to spend all his money, get into debt, and then starve himself into an illness, rather than come again upon his father. And how ill he seemed! When they reached the top of the house at last, Nigel just managed to put his key into Lance's hand, and directly the door was opened, he sank down upon the nearest chair. Lance let him recover himself, and stood looking round in silence. It was a wretched bare room; scanty furniture, and an uneven red-brick floor made it look very unlike the rather luxurious lodgings which Nigel used to affect. The sun coming in at the uncurtained window, cast a square reflection of yellow gold upon the white-

washed wall. There stood the narrow little bed in the corner, where a hard battle had been fought between life and death. There also the uncompromising, stiff-backed chair that gave but poor encouragement to the invalid in the first unwelcome attempt at sitting up. And there, in an untidy heap upon the floor, lay some of the drawing apparatus, from which poor Nigel had chosen his materials in the morning, when he started hopefully on the expedition that had so signally failed.

Lance had plenty of time for his survey, for Nigel, utterly worn out, had fallen asleep, with his head uncomfortably hanging over the wooden arm of his chair.

“Poor fellow!” thought Lance, when he had put the pillow from the bed under his friend’s head, and been rewarded by an impatiently murmured request to be let alone. “Poor fellow! he must have a doctor, and plenty of nourishing things; and some one must look after him, for I’m much mistaken if he is not going to be ill

again. I wonder how he got on before?" And Lance thought of the careless way in which Nigel had said that "everybody" nursed him.

"'Everybody' hasn't made a good hand of it, at all events." And then, as he picked up some of the scattered paint-brushes from the floor, the thought of the copy came back to him. "Something must be done; though I don't see what. Well, I might have spared myself the trouble of grumbling because I had nothing to do. There's plenty of work to the fore here." And he went and pondered at the window.

By-and-by Nigel woke up again—woke with an eager look round the room, and a bright smile of pleasure and relief when his eyes rested on Lance.

"That's all right. I was afraid I had been dreaming. I so often dreamt that somebody came to help me, and you don't know what a bore it was to wake. I——"

He dozed again, but suddenly opened his eyes, and called to Lance in a hurried, sharp tone that startled him.

"Lance, come here. What were you thinking about? Promise me you won't write and ask my father for money."

Lance hesitated.

"Give me your word. Lance, do you hear?" said Nigel, his voice rising.

"My dear Nigel, don't excite yourself. I am not going to do anything you don't like; but surely the wisest thing would be to let your father know you are ill."

A feverish glare of anger lighted up Nigel's eyes.

"You are a traitor, Lance—a base traitor; you have no honour." He had so entirely lost all control over himself that his words came in a sort of hoarse scream. "You want to kill the old man. You come and force my confidence from me, and then betray me! I swear——"

"Hush, Nigel," said Lance authoritatively. "Be quiet. There—all right"—pushing Nigel down as he struggled to his feet. "I promise anything you like, if you'll only keep still and go to bed."

The promise was made, and Nigel for the moment was pacified and exhausted. Whether it was one that it was wise to keep is another question; only this much is certain, that Lance never dreamed of breaking it.

Yet his position was a perplexing one. He had plenty of money at his command, but scarcely the power to spend a single *bajocco* on his friend.

As evening came on Nigel began to grow restless and to wander in his speech. Lance, new to illness and feeling solely responsible, was unreasonably frightened. Some men are born sick-nurses, but, with all the good will in the world, the gift was not in Lance. He wanted to fetch a doctor; but when he tried to make his friend understand where he was going, Nigel answered at random and seemed preparing to go too.

While Lance was coaxing him to lie down again, up came the *padrona di casa*, and finding a well-to-do stranger at her lodger's bedside, instantly flew at him in a torrent of

angry-sounding Italian for the payment of her rent. Nigel clung to him like a frightened child.

Lance's patience fairly gave way. He pushed the woman on to the landing before him, and a rapid altercation followed, noisy on the one side, low but emphatic on the other. When he came back to Nigel's room a few minutes afterwards, he had promised not only to settle the rent, but had made himself answerable for all expenses, if only she would go for a doctor, and leave the sick man undisturbed.

The doctor came, shook his head—not despondently, but with profound wisdom; talked of time, care, patience, and destroyed Lance's confidence by insisting on bleeding the patient.

That night was a bad one, and the next morning he saw clearly that he had many anxious days in store. The attack was one of those slow, tedious fevers that must of necessity run its course. Such an illness is a costly thing, and clearly Nigel must want

for nothing that money could get for him. How long it was before Lance yielded to the force of circumstances he did not quite remember afterwards. It could not have been long, for he was hemmed in on all sides, and saw no other way of escape. He had to give in at last.

One day he found himself, with trembling hands, flushed cheeks, and a beating heart, standing in the gallery of the Corsini Palace, with Nigel's canvas on the easel before him, and the eyes of everybody in the great hall—so it seemed to Lance—fixed wonderingly upon him.

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